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BUSINESS | Page 1



Qatar Airways takes delivery of its fourth Gulfstream exec jet

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Kane rescues Tottenham in Liverpool thriller

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In brief

QATAR | Cables

Emir condolences with Kuwaiti leader

His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, His Highness the Deputy Emir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani and HE the Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani sent yesterday cables of condolences to the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah, on the death of Sheikh Abdullah Bader Saud al-Malek al-Sabah.

QATAR | Official

Emir congratulates Sri Lankan president

His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and His Highness the Deputy Emir Sheikh Abdullah bin Hamad al-Thani sent yesterday cables of congratulations to Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena on the anniversary of his country's Independence Day. HE the Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Nasser bin Khalifa al-Thani sent a similar cable to Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe.

QATAR | Official

Permanent residency draft law discussed

The Advisory Council's Internal and Foreign Affairs Committee met yesterday during the council's 46th regular session, under the chairmanship of its Rapporteur Abdullah bin Fahad bin Ghorab al-Marri. The meeting was attended by the Director General of General Directorate of Border Passports and Expatriate Affairs, Brigadier Mohamed bin Ahmed al-Ateeq, and the Director of Legal Affairs Department at the Ministry of Interior (MoI), Brigadier Salim bin Saqr al-Muraikhi. They explained the MoI's point of view on the draft law on permanent residence card and answered the questions of the committee members. The committee is to continue the study of the draft law at its next meeting.

AMERICA | Accident

Two dead, over 100 hurt in S Carolina train crash

Two Amtrak employees were killed and more than 100 other people were injured early yesterday when a passenger train carrying 147 people hit a freight train in the US state of South Carolina. Amtrak train 91 – travelling from New York to Miami – derailed in Cayce, outside the state capital Columbia, after colliding with a CSX freight train at around 2:30am (0730 GMT). It was the third deadly incident involving an Amtrak train since December, raising questions about the safety of the national railway service. **Page 11**

Sierra Leone president in Doha



Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma arrived in Doha yesterday on an official visit to Qatar. The president and his accompanying delegation were welcomed upon arrival at Hamad International Airport by HE the Minister of Energy and Industry Dr Mohamed bin Saleh al-Sada. **Page 6**

Qatar-US strategic dialogue rebuffs siege nations' lies

●US acknowledges Qatar as a strong partner in the fight against terrorism and a strong economic partner: FM

QNA

Washington

HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani has underlined that the results of the recent strategic dialogue between Qatar and the United States presented a strong response to the siege countries' allegations that Qatar supported terrorism.

Referring to the formation of the political working groups between the two countries to follow up on regional issues, mutual co-operation and exchange of views, the Deputy Premier and Foreign Minister said Qatar had realised many strategic achievements in various fields.

In an interview with Al Jazeera Channel, he said at the military level, there was a declaration of joint de-

fence, which also addresses the US base and the presence of US forces on Qatari soil, as well as the joint military exercises and military procurement. Talks were also held between the parties in combating terrorism and the memorandum of understanding signed by Qatar, which defines the relationship between Qatar and the US in the fight against terrorism through the exchange of information and capacity building.

“Qatar believes that what have been achieved in this dialogue in general in the areas of security, defence and political fields is a clear statement and a clear position from the United States that Qatar is a strong partner in the fight against terrorism and a strong economic partner,” he said.

“This represents a strong response to all claims of the siege countries that Qatar supports terrorism. This is a clear testimony from the US, which is well aware of the Qatari efforts and regards Qatar as a key partner in its fight against terrorism.”

Sheikh Mohamed said Qatar believes its future partnership with the US as promising, and there are many opportunities to achieve it.

On the US position towards the

Gulf crisis, the foreign minister said: “Washington’s position has been clear since the beginning of the crisis, which is still in place.” He explained that the US wanted to see a unified co-operation council and appreciated its relationship with Qatar.

On the announcement of the US Secretary of State on his country’s commitment to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Qatar, the minister pointed out to the existence of a clear and strong partnership between the two countries, adding that America was aware that the accusations against Qatar were false and not based on any evidence.

As for Qatar’s assessment of the US administration’s perception of the complexities of the Gulf crisis, he said the propaganda machine unleashed by the siege countries in the US had an impact in the beginning of the crisis. Also the siege countries exploited legal methods in the United States to serve their purpose of demonising Qatar. Some centres and newspapers in the US were provided with false information but with the success of Qatar’s efforts to clarify the picture, all have come to distinguish between what is true and what is false, he said. **To Page 6**

Plan to set up six traffic offices with insurance firm services

The General Directorate of Traffic has initiated work to establish six offices with insurance companies in order to enable the people to complete procedures at one location, it was announced yesterday.

The proposed offices would serve as a one-stop facility, combining both traffic and insurance services, it is understood.

The General Directorate of Traffic has been successful through a number of measures to overcome many challenges, according to a statement.

Geographic Information System was used for the production of maps, drawings and engineering software. Two new traffic offices were opened in The Pearl-Qatar and in the South while also completing the first phase of linking the security system to the traffic system.

A search and investigation team was formed to investigate serious incidents in addition to the activation of security cameras “Talaat” to control traffic violations and realise the highest rates of traffic safety.

In order to raise the awareness of the people and enhance the media campaigns, the department signed agreements and partnerships with Ministry of Culture and Sports, secondary schools and extended collaboration with Qatar University in the fields of researches and traffic studies.

As part of implementing the strategy of paperless transactions, the first phase of the registration of unknown accidents through Metrash2 was implemented. Mechanical inspection of mechanical vehicles was linked to the traffic

system, and paper report was stopped. The transfer of ownership and renewal of driving licences for all vehicles can be completed through Metrash 2.

These measures were positively reflected in figures. In the Licensing and Permits Section, the works showed increase of 10.2%. The total work amounted to 89,758 transactions in 2016, it went up to 98,932 in 2017. The work of the traffic planning section increased by 9.4% compared to 2016.

The Support and Operations Section recorded an increase of 257% with a total of 348 activities for 2017, while in 2016 there were 97 activities.

The Traffic Awareness Section indicated an increase in the awareness activities by 7% in 2017 compared to activities in 2016. The total activities of 2016 included awareness to pedestrians, the ideal driver, and the awareness of school students and in winter camps, community awareness, external partnerships, and during the National Day, Ramadan campaign. While 264 activities were held in 2016, 282 activities took place in 2017.

The Department of Studies and Traffic Information has also achieved a 15% increase in the number of studies, monthly reports, statistical indicators, surveys and opinion polls.

Enhanced internal and external training courses are key factors to achieve this vision. The number of participants in the internal courses increased in 2017 to reach 889 participants, while 503 participants took part in 2016. As for the external courses, 83 participants attended in 2017 whereas 48 people participated in 2016.

Erdogan to discuss Jerusalem with Pope

Reuters

Vatican City

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan flew to Italy yesterday ahead of talks with Pope Francis that are expected to centre on Jerusalem after US President Donald Trump recognised the holy city as the capital of Israel.

Jerusalem is home to sites holy to the Muslim, Jewish and Christian religions, and Trump’s recent announcement that he would move the US embassy to the city alarmed many allies, who say the decision could doom Middle East peace efforts.

But the two men have found common

ground over Jerusalem, speaking by phone after Trump made his announcement in December and agreeing that any change to the city’s status should be avoided.

Before leaving Turkey, Erdogan said the United States had isolated itself over Jerusalem, which the Palestinians want to share with the Israelis as their future capital.

“In the process ahead, come on and accept Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine. This is the point that is to be reached. We are now working for this,” he told reporters in Istanbul.

Erdogan is due to see the Pope today in what will be the first visit to the Vatican by a Turkish president in 59 years.

Home-based businesses, SMEs want to expand amid blockade

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Many home-based businesses and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) want to expand their operations amid the ongoing blockade on Qatar, a senior Qatar Development Bank (QDB) official has said.

“The blockade itself was an accelerator in understanding the importance of the private sector and home-based business, as well as the importance of creativity and innovation,” QDB’s Marketing and Communications manager Hamad Mejegheer noted.

Speaking to reporters at a press briefing on Shop Qatar recently, he pointed out that an increasing number of Qatari entrepreneurs are aiming to have access to the market.

As a development entity, Mejegheer stressed that QDB has been exerting efforts to help entrepreneurs grow their business and become successful.

The bank, he said, is trying to fill the gap in the market now by giving Qatari entrepreneurs access to both direct and indirect funding and training.

According to Mejegheer, QDB will launch its third edition of ‘Moushtarayat’ soon, an initiative that provides

local SMEs access to large government projects.

In 2017, SMEs in the country secured QR700mn worth of public procurement opportunities, Gulf Times has reported.

“We are working well, after two months we will have ‘Moushtarayat,’ which serves as a platform for entrepreneurs to collaborate with various governmental entities and get some support from them,” Mejegheer said.

He also cited the success of their ‘Made at Home’ exhibition at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre last year, hosting more than 144 home-based businesses that

showcased a wide range of items.

“That was what the blockade did for us. It gave us the compass for the future where we should focus and what we should do,” Mejegheer said.

The start of 2018 also witnessed QDB and Qatar Tourism Authority (QTA) collaborating in this year’s Shop Qatar to provide dozens of home-based businesses and SMEs an opportunity to showcase their products at 30 pop-up shops at Mall of Qatar’s luxury area.

The month-long shopping festival partnered with more than 100 budding entrepreneurs and local businesses to provide a platform that will bring them

closer to customers and broaden their market reach.

Mejegheer said getting some space in a mall, for example, remains a big challenge for budding entrepreneurs.

But through the pop-up shops, he noted that entrepreneurs are able to test how the market responds on the products they offer.

“They will have a customer validation, see if they need to further develop their products to compete with others,” Mejegheer added.

“So giving them just this space to showcase their works is solving one of the challenges they are facing,” he stressed. **Page 2**



Hamad Mejegheer



QDB workshops benefit hundreds

By Joey Aguilar
Staff Reporter

Around 700 entrepreneurs and 161 companies have benefited from Qatar Development Bank's (QDB) training sessions and workshops in 2017, a senior official has said.

QDB's Marketing and Communications manager Hamad Mejegheer told reporters that their 'Learning and Development Department' is helping Qatari entrepreneurs unlock their full potential.

"We have the indirect impact through our workshops," he said, stressing that such programme

created a positive impact on many home-based Qatari entrepreneurs.

Mejegheer noted that they received positive response from a number of participants who took part in several QDB initiatives and exhibitions held in Doha last year.

He said a female Qatari entrepreneur who participated in the 'Ramadan Markets' last year witnessed a surge in demand of her products after the event.

She told us: "You changed my life and the life cycle of my products just by letting me know our customers and giving me such space to test my products."

Ramadan Markets, organised in partnership with the Bedaya

Centre for Entrepreneurship and Career Development and Mall of Qatar, attracted 70 companies offering various products. It also featured more than 30 home-based businesses.

The market showcased a wide range of homemade products and innovative handicrafts from 33 entrepreneurial projects and initiatives, available for shoppers during the holy month of Ramadan.

QDB launched such initiative to encourage and help home-based business owners and family entrepreneurs to develop their marketing skills, as well as promote local products.

Apart from the workshops,

QDB noted that some 181 projects in 2017 have been approved for funding – a direct loan for budding Qatari entrepreneurs to start their business.

Mejegheer said some companies need QR1mn while others may need more like QR100mn. QDB also offers 'guarantee loan' for entrepreneurs of up to QR15mn.

About manufacturing, he said this sector is performing well particularly with the 'Own your Factory in Qatar in 72 Hours' project, a government initiative aimed at fast-tracking the establishment of more manufacturing companies and factories in the country.

Doha Metro work on fast track



The ramp structure at Legtaifiya, adjacent to the Doha Golf Club, serves as a transition point between underground and elevated tracks along the north section of Doha Metro, Qatar Rail has said in a tweet.

Interfaith dialogue to discuss religion and human rights

QNA
Doha

The 13th Doha Conference on Interfaith Dialogue will be held on February 20 and 21 under the theme "Religion and Human Rights".

The conference, which is organised by Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue (DICID), will emphasise the interdependent relationship between religion and human rights.

The conference will address different aspects of human rights issues from the perspective of religion,

mainly Human Rights in Religions (Vision and Concept), the Position of Religion on Human Rights Violations and Human Rights Issues between Heavenly Laws and International Covenants.

Nearly 500 participants from 70 countries, including religious scholars, politicians, academics and researchers are expected to attend the conference.

Commenting on the event, DICID Chairman Dr Ibrahim bin Saleh al-Nuaimi said that dialogue must go beyond conference halls, and enter public culture, schools, universities and communities.

Dr al-Nuaimi was speaking during a meeting with ambassador of Kazakhstan to Qatar Askar Shokybayev, who announced his country's participation in the conference with a delegation led by Vice-Minister of Religious and Civil Society Affairs Berik Sakbayuly Aryn.

Dr al-Nuaimi said that Kazakhstan is one of the most stable countries in the region where the coexistence of religions and cultures is clear.

He underlined that the Kazakh capital, Astana, is typical in this context and symbolises many cultures as well as a mixture of civi-

lisations and religions in one place.

He praised the distinct co-operation between the two sides in the field of dialogue, noting that seed of dialogue which was planted in Doha about 15 years ago has begun to bear fruit, through the great desire to participate in the conference.

For his part, ambassador Shokybayev said that Kazakhstan has some 130 nationalities of different faiths living in harmony and peace.

He stressed the importance of convening such dialogue conferences in Doha and Astana.

QTA goes on media tour in China

Qatar Tourism Authority's (QTA) Marketing and Promotions team held a series of meetings with more than 65 Chinese media representatives earlier this week.

QTA's media tour passed through Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou and marked the beginning of an intensive campaign which aims to solidify the Qatar destination's presence in the Chinese market in 2018.

China has consistently been the world's largest tourism export market with 135mn Chinese citizens recorded to have travelled abroad spending \$261bn in 2016.

As such, QTA's tour follows on a series of developments from late last year that paved the way for Qatar to tap into the market.

In September 2017, QTA signed a memorandum of understanding with the China National Tourism Administration, which granted Approved Destination Status to Qatar as well

as opened its representative offices in China with headquarters in Beijing, and supporting locations in Shanghai and Guangzhou.

"QTA's efforts to diversify visitor source markets calls for growing and solidifying our destination's presence in Asian and European markets. Since September of last year, QTA has taken a number of steps to attract Chinese tourists and preliminary visitor arrival numbers indicate we are moving in the right direction," QTA's chief marketing and promotion officer Rashed al-Qureshe said.

"Our media trip coincided with the Chinese New Year making it an auspicious time to spread Qatar's message of welcoming the world," he added.

In October 2017, QTA organised sessions for professionals from across Qatar's tourism sector with Welcome Chinese officials to discuss the requirements of Chinese visitors, the stand-



Rashed al-Qureshe.

ards for certification, and the certification process.

Industry members were also presented with the training, technical assistance and marketing assistance that Welcome Chinese offers to its certified members across the travel and tourism value chain.

QTA also began with its marketing and promotion efforts in China. Earlier this year, a digital marketing campaign promoting Qatar as an attractive winter tourism destination kicked off

on Ctrip, China's leading online travel agent.

Partnerships with five of China's largest tour operators have also been activated. To boost these efforts, around 20 trade members are expected to visit Qatar on a familiarisation trip later this quarter.

In addition, teams are currently preparing for QTA's first appearance at the China Outbound Travel and Tourism Market alongside 12 members of the Qatari tourism industry.

The 14th edition of the country's largest annual trade show will be held in Beijing this April.

"This will be followed by a roadshow throughout the country, in which we will introduce key members of the Qatari tourism and hospitality sector to Chinese trade agents and tour operators," al-Qureshe said.

National carrier Qatar Airways flies to six different destinations in mainland China.

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Doha Festival City announces a wave of new openings

Doha Festival City (DHFC) will continue opening new shops, restaurants and outlets daily as the mall's anniversary is nearing.

With more than 370 outlets already open for business, including some of the most anticipated international brands, Jamie's Italian, COS, All Saints, Dior Cosmetics and NBA, DHFC is promising even more for its visitors in 2018.

The wave of new openings are set to continue over the next few months – joining an extensive mix of quality outlets already proving a hit with visitors.

Doha's fashionistas will be able to indulge in new women's, men's and children's fashion brands, as well as experience first-class beauty and bridal offerings including Adolfo Dominguez, Minelli, &Other Stories, Rosa Clara, NYX, Optifashion, Gift Shed, and Maison de Joelle.

With more than 50 different dining opportunities and two food courts in the mall, visitors have already been enjoying a whole range of tasty treats.

However, as DHFC heads towards its first anniversary, this existing offering has been further complemented with premium offerings to delight those looking for an international array of flavours.

From popular global family brand, Jamie's Italian by celebrity chef Jaime Oliver to Wagamama – who are further expanding their menu with the introduction of sushi menu to Qatar for the first time.

In addition Eatly, located opposite VOX Cinemas, offer foodies the chance



An outfit from Rosa Clara.



Pizza and pasta at Eatly.

to eat, shop and learn about high quality Italian food and culture.

"The sustained wave of openings that we are experiencing here at Doha Festival City, not only underlines the scale of our destination, but also the complementary mix of international and local brands we want to support in the mall," DHFC's senior marketing manager May Marzooq said. "We know from feedback that our visitors are already excited by the vast range of options available to them, and really exploring all that we have to offer. Year 2018 is set to be a very exciting year for the mall and we are looking forward to Doha celebrating with us as we bring even more Qatar-firsts to the city," Marzooq added.



Transparent ties best way for military progress: Votel

The recent successes against ISIS show that the best way to make military progress across the region is through open and transparent military-to-military relationships, according to the commander of the US Central Command, General Joseph Votel.

"These military-to-military relationships preserve avenues of communication that allow us to de-conflict operations, de-escalate tensions, and reduce the risk of miscalculation or error. We continue to see the value of our transparency and open communication with all of our partners across the region on a daily basis," said Votel during a recent teleconference briefing with journalists from the Arab world.

Votel, who spoke from Centcom's headquarters in Tampa, Florida, discussed the outcome of his 11-day trip to Iraq, Syria, Kuwait, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Jordan. The US Central Command's area of responsibility includes Egypt, the Levant, the Gulf, Iran, and Central Asia.

Votel said despite numerous challenges across the region, "there are a number of areas where we are positioned to make significant progress in the weeks and months ahead."

He underscored the need to recognise the "tremendous sacrifice of our partners" in the fight against ISIS.

"Thousands from the Iraqi Security Forces and the Syrian

Democratic Forces have given their lives or have been wounded during the fights to liberate major cities and liberate the majority of the terrain from ISIS. Having spent several hours in the city of Raqqa just a few days ago, I saw, first-hand, the level of violence that was needed to root out an enemy like ISIS.

"Partner forces on the ground conducted the vast majority of the effort and shed the preponderance of the blood, and for their efforts and sacrifice, we all - the global community - should be thankful for their efforts. Those forces have done well and continue to fight bravely. There is more work to do and they continue to do it. They have honoured the entire 70-mem-



General Joseph Votel, commander, US Central Command.

ber Coalition with their grit and determination," Votel said.

During the "post-hostility period, Votel also emphasised on the need for significant interagency and international action

to alleviate and avoid significant humanitarian crisis.

"As I mentioned, I was in Raqqa this week, and while there is some efforts at stabilisation that are underway, the need is much greater than the current resources that are available there. There is an urgent need now for a global effort to help with the recovery of displaced people, and the rebuilding and stabilisation of war-torn areas.

"This is a massive effort that no single nation can undertake alone. Otherwise, if we don't do this, we will find ourselves fighting the terrorists again in the future, and we will be unable to address the important underlying tensions that often times lead to terrorism," Votel said.

Growth in residential properties to lead sector, says report

The expected growth in the residential real estate sector is expected to extend to other real estate groups, according to SAK Holding Group's latest market report.

However, construction of various residential units will lead construction projects expected for this year as a result of the state projects related to the development of various infrastructure projects.

The monthly report, prepared by SAK's market watch bureau, said transportation networks will drive land owners to seize the opportunity to develop these lands "as soon as possible," which means a growing need for real estate liquidity in the construction sector of housing units.

"On the flip side, there is varying real estate liquidity and maybe less will be distributed to real estate groups depending on investment factors pertaining to the site and the nature of the construction," the report said.

Also, the report said the real estate market is preparing to receive large areas of commercial properties as a large number of commercial complexes in various areas are nearing completion, which may lead to growth in commercial areas and retail trade business by about 70%.

"It is imperative to deal realistically with this challenge,

without imposing additional burdens on the existing ones," the report pointed out.

According to the report, a number of general economic indicators had a positive impact on the real estate market. The 13.4% growth in the number of companies established in Qatar last year "is a clear indication of attractiveness," the report said.

It stated that the establishment of 14,639 new companies in Qatar over the past year will increase demand for a variety of units and areas of land, particularly in the commercial sector.

Citing official sources, the report said the 27 foreign companies established in Qatar after the economic blockade was imposed on Qatar in June 2017 "confirms the attractiveness of Qatar's investment climate."

"The attractiveness of the country's investment climate was not affected by the restrictions imposed by the blockading countries on Qatar," the report said.

It also pointed out that the development of Qatar's service facilities, transport projects, and infrastructure is also a general indicator of the positive economic effects of revitalising the real estate market, which will revive sectors such as construction, hospitality, and tourism services.

Juvenile Police Department runs awareness campaign

The Juvenile Police Department, in collaboration with the management of Villaggio, has held an exhibition with the aim of ensuring "social protection and the real care of children within the family and society, shielding them from all forms

of deviation," the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has said.

The initiative is in line with the strategy of the awareness and information section at the Juvenile Police Department for 2018, which seeks to educate children and young people through awareness events and



Officials during the awareness campaign.

exhibitions within and outside commercial complexes, according to a statement by the MoI.

The exhibition turned out to be a big draw for visitors, who expressed happiness and optimism

at the efforts made by the Juvenile Police Department to raise awareness among young people and confront all that is harmful and contrary to the country's laws, the statement noted.

The public interacted with

employees of the awareness section, who distributed informative leaflets of the Juvenile Police Department and highlighted their role in "protecting young people from the dangers of deviation"

'People are more politically aware now'

People in Qatar are more politically aware than they were in the past because of social media, Doha resident Ufaq Zehra told Qatar Urdu Radio's live show Haqeeqat yesterday.

"Social media has changed everything because people have access to news on their fingertips," Zehra said, adding that people were very well informed about the developments of the Gulf crisis through social media. She also said that the blockading countries were inciting people against Qatar through media and mosques. "It is very sad to see these countries spreading false propaganda against Qatar through different channels, especially through Friday sermons," Zehra, a qualified journalist,

said that the blockading countries were in a fix because they cannot defend their allegations against Qatar. "Qatar has strongly refuted all the allegations with proof, showing the world how the siege was illegal and unjust. But the blockading countries cannot retreat or move on since they cannot justify their actions."

Speaking about the reasons for imposing the siege on June 5 last year, Zehra said that a popular opinion is that the blockading countries wanted to hide internal issues such as unemployment and inflation from their citizens by propagating a political crisis in the region.

Haqeeqat is a joint venture of the *Gulf Times* and Qatar Media Corp Urdu Radio. The show, hosted by Saif-ur-Rehman, aims to engage and



Ufaq Zehra, left, with Saif-ur-Rehman.

interact with the large South Asian expatriate community in Qatar. Log on to Qatar Urdu

Radio on Facebook and '@QatarUrduRadio' on Twitter for feedback and comments about the show.

Malabar Gold draw winner named



Kamal, a winner of 'Malabar Gold & Diamonds Festival' receives QR50,000 cash prize from Don Antony, manager, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Gharrafa, in the presence of other officials.

PHCC's 'Screen for Life' marks World Cancer Day

'Screen For Life', Qatar's National Breast and Bowel Cancer Screening programme, under Primary Health Care Corporation (PHCC) marked the global initiative World Cancer Day.

It has also reminded the PHCC physicians to electronically refer eligible patients to the screening facilities.

Under the tagline 'We Can, I Can', 'Screen for Life' is working on part of the objectives of World Cancer Day including, raising awareness of cancer and healthier lifestyles, preventing cancer, and providing patients with the best care.

In line with its ongoing awareness drive 'Screen for Life'

is reminding eligible people to embark on a screening for breast and bowel cancer and is touring communities with the specialised mobile screening unit.

"Screen for Life' is urging eligible women aged 45-69 to book an appointment for a complementary mammogram at one of the dedicated facilities at Al Wakrah, Lebaib or Rawdat Al Khail health centres. The team is also encouraging men and women aged 50-74 to seek a screening for bowel cancer and collect the fit kit at one of the facilities.

In its efforts to reach as wide an audience as possible with the programme's message and mission, the 'Screen for Life' mobile screening unit will be present

at Al Shamal Health Centre throughout the month, enabling women to explore the facility and learning more about the programme. During its tour, the mobile unit will also host free mammogram tests for eligible ladies.

The mobile unit is a key component to the programme's mission to raise cancer awareness across Qatar, consistently touring governmental departments, semi-government entities and private sector organisations.

To book a screening appointment or for more information on the 'Screen for Life' programme and the mobile unit, people can contact the dedicated call centre on 8001112.

Vodafone Qatar hosts cancer awareness session for staff

Vodafone Qatar marked World Cancer Day in partnership with Qatar Cancer Society by hosting a cancer awareness session for its employees yesterday.

The Qatar Cancer Society gave Vodafone's employees an overview of the most common types of cancer, the signs and symptoms to look for, what preventative measures can be taken, and the importance of early detection.

World Cancer Day, held every on February 4, is a global event that helps raise awareness on cancer and how to prevent, detect, and treat it. The day aims to save millions of preventable deaths each year by also educating people about the disease.

Currently, 8.8mn people die from cancer worldwide every year, out of which, 4mn people die prematurely. In Qatar, there are 1,400 new cancer cases every year with breast cancer as the most common type of cancer.

"Spreading the awareness about cancer is our responsibility as a company that puts its people's well-being at the heart of everything we do. Each year in February, we stress the importance of early detection and are committed to continue raising the awareness," said Mohamed al-Yami, director, external affairs at Vodafone Qatar.



Participants at a cancer awareness session yesterday.

Kahramaa holds introductory meeting for new employees

The new staff members of the Qatar General Electricity and Water Corporation (Kahramaa) were introduced to the corporation's working system and job environment at a formal meeting at the Kahramaa Awareness Park recently.


The new employees were briefed on the quality of the services to be delivered so as to meet the needs and requirements of the people and institutions, who are the corporation's customers.

They were also briefed on the role of the corporation in meeting the requirements of the people and the necessity of attaining a higher level

of professionalism to cater to the customers' requirements.


The newcomers were also introduced to the quality of training programmes at the corporation and briefed on the new skills to be acquired during their probation period.

While formally welcoming the new members to the organisation, they were told about the targets to be achieved. This is important as everyone needs to meet the requirements of the people in line with the goals and objectives of the Qatar National Vision 2030, said an official while addressing the newcomers.



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Health for Life

Top global award for HMC's mental health nursing service

The Hamad Medical Corporation's Mental Health Service has won the 2017 National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators (NDNQI) Award for Outstanding Nursing Quality.

This is the second consecutive year that the HMC's Mental Health Nursing Service has won the award, which is presented annually by Press Ganey Associates, Inc. HMC was the only award recipient located outside the US and was up against 200 international NDNQI users.

Prof Nicola Ryley, chief nursing officer at HMC, said, "As healthcare becomes increasingly complex, we recognise the importance of developing our nursing staff who play a pivotal role in driving quality improvement and driving patient safety standards. I am very proud of our Mental Health Service nursing teams who have worked hard to improve the care being delivered to their patients. Their commitment is outstanding and I am pleased this has been recognised for the second consecutive year by an internationally respected and independent organisation."

The nursing teams were assessed and scored favourably against key indicators, including patient falls (with and without injury), use of physical restraints, physical assault rates – against staff and other patients, staff survey – staff rated HMC as a good place to work and the length of stay – reducing the average length of stay for patients once medically fit for discharge.

Mahmoud al-Raisi, HMC's chief of continuing care said,



This is the second consecutive year that the HMC's Mental Health Nursing Service has won the award, which is presented annually by Press Ganey Associates, Inc. HMC was the only award recipient located outside the US and was up against 200 international NDNQI users.

"The engagement and contribution of staff from all levels of the organisation has ensured the success of the mental health nursing service. This has happened by promoting shared values. A strong sense of family creates a happier working environment in which staff feel cared for and supported. This positive working environment promotes resilience, healthy working relationships, and fosters an environment that encourages and ensures compassionate nursing care."

The NDNQI Award for Outstanding Nursing Quality is presented annually to the best performing hospital in each of six categories: academic medical centre, teaching hospital, community hospital, paediatric hospital, rehabilitation hospital, and psychiatric hospital.

"Our nursing philosophy continues to be one of support for our nurses who strive to deliver the highest quality of care, using the best evidence-based practice and latest data to make

improvements at the patient's bedside," said Hoda Salam Nakhla, director of nursing at HMC's Mental Health Service.

"This award is an important achievement for HMC and our Mental Health Service teams and demonstrates our commitment to the patients we care for."

The NDNQI is the only national nursing database that provides quarterly and annual reporting of structure, process, and outcome indicators to evaluate nursing care at the unit level.



Mahmoud al-Raisi, HMC's chief of Continuing Care.



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Mada, malomatia sign deal for IT solutions

Mada Assistive Technology Centre and malomatia, Qatar's leading provider of IT services and solutions, have signed a co-operation agreement to provide and develop a variety of IT solutions to support Mada's annual strategy.

Through this strategic partnership, Mada will collaborate with malomatia to benefit from its extensive experience in delivering integrated IT solutions and best practices to government and private sector clients, according to a press statement.

The aim of this agreement is to launch the second phase of the development and improvement of Mada's official website to provide its users with the best experiences and services to meet their needs and requirements.

The first phase of the site's development was successful after malomatia completed its development, the statement noted.

The signing of this agreement originated from the belief of the two leading institutions in the importance of co-operation and integration between all national entities to realise Qatar National Vision 2030 and its social and economic development pillars.

Yousif Abdulrahman al-Naama, board member and CEO of malomatia, said: "By supporting national initiatives, we support the development of the community, and this is an integral part of the company's social responsibility programme. Through Qatar Vision 2030 and the Electronic Government's Strategy, we are constantly seeking to provide support to a number of stakeholders in the community. Through this agreement, we aim to develop and develop innovative and diverse technological solutions and services that help Mada achieve its strategy."

Maha al-Mansouri, CEO of Mada Centre, noted: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank malomatia for their continued support. As a non-profit organisation, we are always looking for partners to share our key messages and support persons with disabilities so that they can reach their full potential.

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4. Rasha Salah Salama M. Elasmr	9. Refah Mubarak F. M. Al Faisal
5. Jibran Bayda &/or Ibrahim Baida	10. Abdulaziz Haji A. Malik

Monthly Winners of QAR 10,000

1. Deceased Maqboula Mousa F. Alali	6. Sh. Abdulaziz Al Thani
2. Minor Omar Abdelaziz Aboushakra	7. Eman Ahmed K. Al-Baker
3. Saad Hamad H. M. Al Dosari	8. Yasser Hassan Ali El Shewikh
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Dialogue rebuffs siege nations' lies

From Page 1

About hosting Qatari officials at American institutes known for their right-wing tendencies, the deputy prime minister and foreign minister said Qatar was open to all institutions in the US. On the siege countries disseminating false information about Qatar, the minister said a company registered with the US Department of Justice was contracted by the UAE to spread news on the social media that Qatar supported terrorism. On the GCC crisis, he said Qatar had always been calling for

a dialogue with the siege countries to discuss a solution based on clear principles and foundations. "We see that everyone is a loser in this crisis. We see that we have lost so much in the GCC, which was built by our fathers and founded in 1981. It was in the direction of moving from the stage of co-operation to the union phase. All of this we have lost because of reckless acts." The deputy prime minister and foreign minister praised the Qatari people, saying "the people of Qatar stood together in front of all the forces that are

trying to attack them and their sovereignty". He added that Qatar's leadership took a position from the first day, which was to stand firm and move forward. The minister said the crisis had stopped all forms of co-operation between the GCC countries. Qatar has explained to the US that the reckless policies adopted by some countries, whether against Qatar or Lebanon or Yemen, Somalia or Syria would have serious consequences. "We believe that the region, in general, lacks a clear and wise policy."



HE the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohamed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani

Sierra Leone leader pays visit to Museum of Islamic Art

QNA
Doha

Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma and his accompanying delegation visited the Museum of Islamic Art yesterday evening as part of his current visit to Qatar. The Sierra Leone leader was accompanied by HE the Minister of Energy and Industry Dr Mohamed bin Saleh al-Sada. The president toured in the sections of the museum and its various wings and got acquainted with the collection of

antiquities and Islamic artefacts, which include rare treasures of heritage including books, manuscripts and coins made of silver, copper, and bronze, as well as crafts made of glass, ivory, textiles, wood and precious stones, and collectibles collected from three continents dating back 14 centuries. President Koroma listened to an explanation of the Museum of Islamic Art and its stages of development as well as its role in spreading science, culture and encouraging creativity in addition to communicating with the cultures and arts of the world.

Ooredoo celebrates its Supernet achievements

To celebrate its launch of "one of the first '5G Speed Experiences' available anywhere in the world", Ooredoo has announced that it has produced a special advertisement showcasing telecommunications milestones in Qatar. The video, which is available now via the company's YouTube channel in English and Arabic, highlights the history of Ooredoo, from the first telephone line in 1949, the launch of dialup Internet and the 3G network, right up to Ooredoo's 5G experience. So far, the video has been viewed by more than 150,000 people and received a host of positive comments on social



media and the video platform, with many customers expressing their excitement for Ooredoo's upcoming 5G rollout, the company has said in a statement. The current '5G Speed Experience' is available in select locations and offers an "extremely high speed and low latency network" with initial speeds up to (and in some cases exceeding) 1Gbps, according to Ooredoo. Access to the '5G Speed

Experience' requires a special smartphone that has been calibrated to work with the Ooredoo pre-standardised 5G network. The company has announced plans to roll out its 5G network as soon as possible, the statement noted. Ooredoo said it launched its Supernet campaign in 2015 and has gone on to "invest heavily in ensuring the fastest Internet speeds and crystal-clear communications for its customers". Talking about the investment

Ooredoo has made, Waleed al-Sayed, CEO at Ooredoo Qatar, said: "Launching the Supernet was a way for Ooredoo to show our customers our dedication and commitment to making Qatar a truly connected country. "We've invested heavily in our infrastructure to provide a better customer experience on the Ooredoo network, as well as contribute to the Qatar National Vision's aim to boost the knowledge-based economy, by enabling seamless access to the financial, educational and social services the Internet can provide." Readers can watch the video at https://youtu.be/_M6B1_gUvZE

St Regis Doha welcomes new executive chef



Chef James Norman

The St Regis Doha recently appointed chef James Norman as their new executive chef to serve their award-winning restaurants and superior culinary teams. Chef Norman's impressive career spans over 23 years of professional culinary experience across Europe, Middle East and Asia having worked for the Sultan of Brunei at the Empire Hotel & Country Club in Brunei and for Guy Savoy in Paris. Prior to his formal appointment at The St Regis Doha, chef Norman was executive chef at Siam Kempinski Hotel, Bangkok as well as previously holding the prestigious title of executive chef at the Emirates Palace, Abu Dhabi, and regional executive

chef for Europe at the Grand Hotel Kempinski, Geneva. Chef Norman also has under his belt an eclectic list of five star properties including the Mandarin Oriental in Geneva and Hong Kong, Burj Al Arab in Dubai and the Lanesborough Hotel and The Dorchester Hotel - both located

in London. In his role as executive chef at The St Regis Doha, chef Norman will oversee all culinary aspects of the hotel's various gastronomic offerings which include: Astor Grill, The Club, Sarab Lounge, Al Sultan Ibrahim, Vine, Gordon Ramsay Mediterranean and Opal by Gordon Ramsay, the Raw Bar, Oyster Bay & Bar, Vintage Lounge and Hakkasan, as well as banquets and external catering. A UK national, chef Norman is also fluent in Spanish and French. "We believe that chef Norman's refined culinary experience and exquisite creations will certainly leave our guests happy and impressed," The St Regis Doha area general manager Tareq Derbas said.

Free bonus allowance promo for Ooredoo App customers

To thank the one million plus customers who downloaded the Ooredoo App, Ooredoo has announced the launch of a new free bonus allowance promotion. All new and existing Ooredoo App customers can enjoy the offer which will give Ooredoo App users a free bonus every day for seven days. The promotion, which started yesterday, will end on February 10, and bonuses will include free data, local minutes and SMS, and international calling minutes. The free bonus allowance will be valid until midnight on the day of activation and customers can redeem the daily bonus by logging into the Ooredoo App daily and clicking the 'Free Bonus' tile. The Ooredoo App, first launched in 2013, is available for iOS and Android us-

ers and has an average score rating of 4.3 on the iTunes store. The Ooredoo App was designed to give customers access to their services when they need it the most, and through the app, Ooredoo customers can check their balance, maintain subscriptions, resolve any issue and much more on the go. Most importantly, Ooredoo's customers who use the app receive personalised deals based on their profile and usage. App users also benefit from the company's free data giveaway, which has seen app usage drastically increase since its launch. To ensure that customers have the latest Ooredoo App version, users should head to Ooredoo.qa/app or SMS 'App' to 114. Full details of the Ooredoo App could be had from Ooredoo.qa/app

Two more Turkish soldiers killed in Syria offensive: army

AFP
Ankara

Two more Turkish soldiers were killed yesterday in Turkey's offensive against Kurdish militia inside Syria, the army said, bringing to 16 the number killed so far in the incursion. Turkey on January 20 launched the "Olive Branch" operation against Syrian Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) militia which Ankara sees as a terror group and a threat to Turkish territory. The Turkish army and allied Ankara-backed Syrian rebel forces are seeking to oust the YPG from its western border stronghold of Afrin but the operation so far has been marked by fierce clashes. Five Turkish soldiers were also wounded in operations inside Syria yesterday, the army said in a statement. It did not give further details on the circumstances of the deaths and injuries. The latest casualties come after seven Turkish troops were killed on Saturday, including five in a tank attack, the heaviest single-day loss of the campaign so far.



Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army fighters are seen in the eastern suburbs of Al Bab, yesterday.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said yesterday said that 935 "terrorists have been neutralised" so far in the operation. It was not immediately possible to verify this figure. Turkey says the YPG is an offshoot of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has waged a three-decade insurgency

against the Turkish state. But the YPG has been working closely with the United States to fight the Islamic State group in Syria. The offensive by Washington's fellow Nato member Ankara on a US-allied force has even raised fears of a military confrontation between two alliance powers.

Air raid hits Yemen criminal probe unit

AFP
Sanaa

An air raid hit the criminal investigations unit in Yemen's rebel-held capital Sanaa yesterday as insurgents battle the government, backed by a Saudi-led coalition, for control of the country. The four-storey building and a line of police cars parked outside were largely destroyed in the attack. The Iran-backed Houthi rebels blamed the attack on the Saudi-led military coalition that has been fighting to prop up the Yemeni government since March 2015. Rebel-run Yemeni media said seven people were killed and 58 wounded in the Sunday attack. The toll could not be independently confirmed. A spokesman for the coalition said the military alliance was investigating the raid. He did not comment on the toll. "We take this report very seriously and it will be fully investigated, as all reports of this nature are, using an internationally approved, independent process," the spokesman said. "Whilst this is ongoing, it would be inappropriate to comment further."

The coalition, the only party known to regularly operate air raids on Sanaa, was blacklisted by the UN for the killing and maiming of children in air raids on Yemen. The Houthis, who hail from northern Yemen, in December claimed full control of Sanaa, three years after they forged an agreement with strongman Ali Abdullah Saleh to jointly rule the capital. Saleh was killed in the December Houthi takeover after their alliance fell apart. In November, a rival criminal investigations unit in the government stronghold of Aden was struck in an Islamist suicide attack. Gunmen stormed the crime unit and set files and archives on fire as an explosive bomber detonated an suicide belt at the building's entrance.

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Rouhani raps latest US nuclear plan

Reuters
Dubai

Iran accused the United States yesterday of threatening Russia with new atomic weapons after Washington published a document outlining plans to expand its nuclear capabilities to deter others. The review of US nuclear policy published on Friday has riled Russia, which viewed the document as confrontational, and raised fears that it could increase the risk of miscalculation between the two world powers. "The Americans are shamelessly threatening Russia with a new atomic weapon," Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, a pragmatist who opened the way to Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers including longtime adversary Washington, said in a speech. "The same people who supposedly believe that using weapons of mass destruction is a crime against humanity...are talking about new weapons to threaten or use against rivals," he said in his televised address. Foreign Minister Mohamed Javad Zarif earlier warned in a tweet that the US policy document posed the risk of "bringing humankind closer to annihilation". The US military has put countering China and Russia, dubbed "revisionist powers", at the centre of a new

national defence strategy unveiled earlier this month shifting priorities away from fighting Islamist militants. By expanding its own low-yield nuclear capability, the United States would deter Russia from using nuclear weapons, according to American officials. Russia's Foreign Ministry said on Saturday it was very disappointed by the content of the document, which, it said, has a confrontational feel and anti-Russian orientation. German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel said the US decision showed "the spiral of a new nuclear arms race is already under way" and added that Europe was, much like during the Cold War, especially vulnerable. "That's why we need to start new initiatives in Europe for arms control and disarmament," Gabriel said in a statement, adding that developing new weapons sent the wrong message and risked triggering an arms race. Zarif also said in his tweet: "(US President Donald) Trump's obduracy in killing the #JCPOA (Iran's nuclear deal with world powers) stems from the same dangerous imprudence". Trump gave the Iran nuclear deal, negotiated before he took office, a final reprieve last month but warned European allies and Congress they had to work with him to fix "the disastrous flaws" in the pact or face a US exit.

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Jordan's King Abdullah sees no Mideast peace without US role

AFP
Washington

King Abdullah II of Jordan said yesterday that the United States remains essential to any hope of a peaceful solution between Israel and the Palestinians, despite widespread criticism of the new US stance on Jerusalem.

"We cannot have a peace process or a peace solution without the role

of the United States," the monarch said on the CNN programme *Fareed Zakaria GPS*.

This was true even after President Donald Trump decided to move the US embassy from Tel Aviv — where nearly every other country has its embassy — to Jerusalem, he said.

In December, Jordan had called Trump's move "a violation of decisions of international law and the United Nations charter," and Abdullah re-iter-

ated his concerns to Vice President Mike Pence who visited the Middle East last month.

And Abdullah noted yesterday that Trump's decision had "created a backlash" by leaving Palestinians feeling "that there isn't an honest broker."

But, he added, "I'd like to reserve judgment, because we're still waiting for the Americans to come out with their (peace) plan."

Protest against aid cuts



Palestinian schoolchildren shout slogans and hold placards during a protest in Gaza city yesterday, against the difficult economic situation and the US decision to withhold funds earmarked for the UN relief agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

Trial again postponed for Palestinian teen

AFP
Jerusalem

The military trial of a Palestinian teenager charged after a viral video showed her hitting two Israeli soldiers in the occupied West Bank has been delayed until February 13, officials said yesterday.

Ahed Tamimi, 17, had been due to stand trial on January 31 along with her mother Nariman before the case was postponed until February 6.

It is now set for February 13, her lawyer and the Israeli military said.

Both Ahed Tamimi and

her mother have been ordered to be held in custody throughout their trial.

The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has criticised Israeli authorities' actions in the case, while the European Union has expressed concern over Israel's detention of minors, including Ahed Tamimi.

Ahed Tamimi, who was 16 at the time of her arrest, has been hailed as a hero by Palestinians who see her as bravely standing up to Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

Israelis accuse her family of using her as a pawn in staged provocations.

She has been charged with 12 counts including assault and could face a lengthy jail term if convicted. The charges relate to events in the video and five other incidents.

They include stone-throwing, incitement and making threats.

Ahed Tamimi's family says the December 15 incident that led to the arrests occurred in the yard of their home in Nabi Saleh, near Ramallah in the West Bank.

Israel's military said the soldiers were in the area to prevent Palestinians from throwing stones at Israeli motorists.

A video shows Ahed Tamimi and her cousin Nour approaching two soldiers and telling them to leave before shoving, kicking and slapping them.

Ahed Tamimi is the most aggressive of the two in the video.

The heavily armed soldiers do not respond to what appears to be an attempt to provoke rather than seriously harm them.

They then move backwards after Nariman Tamimi becomes involved.

Nour Tamimi, 20, has also been charged and freed on bail.

Her next court date has also been set for Febru-

ary 13, according to the Tamimis' lawyer Gaby Lasky.

The scuffle took place amid clashes and protests against US President Donald Trump's controversial recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Relatives say that a member of the Tamimi family was wounded in the head by a rubber bullet fired during those protests.

Nineteen Palestinians have been killed since Trump's declaration on December 6, most of them in clashes with Israeli forces.

One Israeli has been shot dead since then.

Israel 'legalises' rogue settlement

AFP
Jerusalem

Israel's cabinet voted yesterday to formally authorise a rogue West Bank settlement in response to last month's murder of a rabbi who lived there, officials said, in a rare move likely to spark an international outcry.

The vote came as European nations voiced growing concern over settlement expansion in the occupied Palestinian territory, but with US President Donald Trump largely refraining from such criticism, which many Israelis see as a green light.

Israeli authorities have advanced plans for thousands of new settlement homes in recent months, although cabinet votes to authorise a pre-existing outpost are relatively rare.

Yesterday's vote to authorise the Havat Gilad outpost was unanimous, an official familiar with the proceedings said on condition of anonymity.

Speaking at the start of the meeting, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said "the government will today regularise the status of Havat Gilad to allow the continuance of normal life there".

The official cabinet agenda said the motion would designate the 15-year-old outpost as a "new community" which will have the necessary building permits and a state budget.

The agenda said about 40 families live in the outpost, but envisages its enlargement.

Israeli media, however, said it was unclear how the authorisation would proceed, as parts of the outpost may have to be moved elsewhere if found to have been built on private Palestinian land.

Rabbi Raziel Shevach was shot dead near Havat Gilad, where he lived, on January 9. The following week, Israeli troops searching for his attackers shot dead what they described as a Palestinian suspect in the city of Jenin in the northern West Bank, about 35 kilometres north of Havat Gilad.

However, they did not catch the man suspected of being responsible for Shevach's killing, 22-year-old Ahmad Jarrar.

The manhunt continued on Saturday with a raid on the West Bank village of Burqin, near Nablus, sparking clashes during which soldiers shot dead a teenager identified by the Palestinian health ministry as Ahmad Abu Obeid, 19.

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(0013

- تسلم الوثائق لمنسوب الشركة بعد ابراز كتاب تفويض من الشركة / المؤسسة + صورة من البطاقة الشخصية + سجل تجاري + شهادة تصنيف مقاول في ما يخص شركات المقاولات + الايصال الدال على سداد قيمة الوثائق .

- سيكون اخر موعد لتقديم الطعاهات هو الساعة الثانية عشر من صباح يوم الاحفال , ولن يلتفت لاي عطاء يرد بعدد الموعد المحدد.

- اعطاف مظروف يتضمن خطاب ضمان مصرفي / شيك مصدق من احد البنوك العاملة في دولة قطر بالقيمة المبيينة اعادة كتابين موقت لمدة (120) يوم .

- يجب ان يكون العرض صالحاً لمدة (90) يوماً من تاريخ فتح الطعاهات.

- تسلم الطعاهات في لجنة المناقصات والمزايدات , المكان بمحسكر الحرس الاميري (برزان) من اصل وصورة .

- يجب ان يكون الطعاه الغلفي في مظروف والمالي في مظروف اخر مغفلة ومختومة بالشمع الاحمر ومغونة باسم رئيس لجنة المناقصات والمزايدات بالحرس الاميري , ويكتب عليه رقم المناقصة وموضوعها .

- يقدم صاحب الطعاه المقبول تأميناً نهائياً بمقدار (10 ٪) من اجمالي القيمة الراسيه عليه , ويمسي لمدة لاتقل عن (90يوماً) بعد الانتهاء من تنفيذ المشروع .

- سوف يتم استبعاد اي عطاء لا يلتزم بالشروط اعلاه .

للاستفسار يرجى الاتصال على هاتف رقم (44220292) ف (44220266)

For Further Information / Queries please contact Tel No 44220292 Fax No. 44220266

رئيس لجنة المناقصات والمزايدات
الحرس الاميري

Chairman of the Committee of tenders and auctions
Amiri Guard

QATARGAS OPERATING COMPANY LTD
Tender Invitation

No.	TENDER NUMBER / DESCRIPTION	TENDER ISSUE PERIOD Sunday to Thursday (08.00 am to 02.00 pm)	TENDER FEE (QR)	TENDER BOND (QR)	TENDER CLOSING DATE
1.	LTC/C/LRN/3324/17 PIGGING OF FURNACE TUBES IN LAFFAN REFINERY ON CALL-OFF BASIS	05 February 2018 to 11 February 2018	500	200,000	26 February 2018

Scope of Work:

Contractor shall be responsible for providing skilled manpower, equipment/tools to carryout pigging for decoking and internal inspection of condensate fractionation furnace tubes in Laffan Refinery asset in RUC on call-off basis. The Contract duration shall be for five years.

Bid Validity: Bid should be valid for 180 days from the Tender Closing Date.

Tender Fee: Interested parties shall first deposit the appropriate Tender Fee (non-refundable) in cash (Cheque will not be accepted) into Account name; Qatargas Operating Company Limited- call Account. Qatar National Bank, Main Branch, P.O.Box: 1000, Doha Qatar. Qatargas Bank Account No.0013-002521-052, IBAN#QA64QNBAA00000000013002521052. Tenderer must mention their company's full name and Tender Number on the Bank deposit slip. Also, it is mandatory to submit a copy of the valid Commercial Registration and an authorization letter from their company with the name, telephone, fax and e-mail ID of the focal point for this tender.

Place for Tender Collection and Bid Submission:

LTC Section, Ground Floor, Qatargas Doha Head Office, West Bay, Doha, Qatar.

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In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي)

صدق الله العظيم

With profound grief we announce the sad demise of

Ahmed Bin Abdulla Bin Issa Al-Mannai

Father of

Khalid Ahmed Al-Mannai

Abdulla Ahmed Al-Mannai

Walid Ahmed Al-Mannai

Funeral prayer will be held tomorrow, Tuesday

following Asr Prayer

at Abu Hamoor Cemetery (Mesaimmer)

Condolence Ceremony for Men

will be held at the Majlis of

Mr. Abdul Rahman Bin Issa Al Mannai, Patriarch of the Family

From Tuesday to Thursday

Duhail, Zone No. 30, Al Khafji St. No. 385, Building No. 472

Condolence Ceremony for Ladies

will be held at the Late Family Residence in Bin Mahmoud Area

From Tuesday to Friday

Bin Mahmoud, Zone No. 22, Al Reem St. No. 950, Building No. 15

May his soul rest in peace

"We belong to Allah and to Him we shall return"



Off-grid power push aims to light up incomes

By **Isaiah Esipisu, Reuters**
Kakamega, Kenya

Catherine Wakhu knows the value of a lighted room to a child's education – and also the expense.

The resident of Mayoni, a village in Western Kenya's Kakamega County, has seven school-age children.

Without money to pay for a connection to the electric grid, she used to spend 1,200 shillings (\$12) a month instead on kerosene, half of it to fuel a lantern so that her children could do their homework in the evenings.

But for the past year Wakhu has been the owner of two solar-powered lanterns, which enable her children to study and save her fuel money.

New Light Africa, the company that makes the lanterns,

accepts payments on instalment over a period of six months, making the cost of 3,000 Kenyan shillings (\$29) per lantern more affordable to people like Wakhu, who might otherwise struggle to acquire the technology.

The business is one of a number of enterprises across sub-Saharan Africa that are developing ideas for low-cost, high-quality and affordable clean energy products and services, from lighting to irrigation.

Some have received funding from the Renewable Energy and Adaptation to Climate Technologies (REACT) programme, part of the Africa Enterprise Challenge Fund, backed by European and other donor governments.

The clean energy REACT programme provides up to half the needed funding to private companies trying to develop business models, services and products

in renewable energy and energy efficiency that will improve the lives of the rural poor.

Under the programme, up to 900,000 rural households across the region can now light their homes with solar lanterns, press their clothes with solar-powered irons or watch solar-powered televisions, said Victor Ndiege, who manages the REACT-supported portfolio of businesses.

Village barbers also can earn a living shaving people using solar-powered shavers, and farmers can irrigate their crops with solar pumps, he said.

In Miguye, a village north of the Kenyan city of Kisumu, Oliver Bill, a 24-year-old university graduate, irrigates tomatoes on his 1.3-acre piece of land using a portable solar-powered water pump acquired with a loan from Future Pump, another company that is part of the REACT scheme.

"I decided to take the risk because the repayment scheme sounded fair enough," said Bill.

He said he expects to have repaid the debt for the pump by March.

Malayo Abuti, the assistant administrative chief for Ebu-hala sub-location in Kakamega County, said business-oriented funding for clean energy projects is an improvement on handouts and is helping more young people in off-grid villages start their own enterprises to earn an income.

"This is a good culture because paying back the loan gives one a sense of ownership, self esteem and it makes them more responsible than receiving free tokens from organisations," he said.

The REACT scheme selects companies to support through competitions.

So far, 78 companies across 23

sub-Saharan African countries have been awarded grants and interest-free loans to implement their proposals, Ndiege said.

The companies are required to make services and products available to rural communities without requiring full payment upfront, he said.

New Light Africa won the competition in 2016 to make and distribute solar lanterns to rural communities through a community-based organisation.

"Between 2016 and 2017, we sold over 59,000 lanterns in Western Kenya and parts of the Rift Valley," said Jakob Werner, the company's head of sales.

Each lantern comes with a small solar panel and is powerful enough to light one room.

It is portable, meaning it can also work as a torch, and it has a port for charging at least three mobile phones.

According to Ndiege, companies are funded if their clean energy services and products are of sufficient quality and they have a plan for getting equipment to customers without the high upfront costs often associated with renewable energy.

"We always discuss with our customers to understand their financial strength before proposing to them the most appropriate payment package," said Reagan Omondi, general manager of Solar Now, which has sold 600 home solar systems in Kenya's Nyanza area over the past six months.

The systems can power up to six fluorescent tubes and a television set and radio, as well as charging mobile phones, he said.

Omondi notes that some customers are able to pay upfront for the system, which is priced from 27,500 shillings (\$270), but

others pay over a period ranging from six to 24 months, depending on their income.

"In line with the Sustainable Development Goals, our aim is to see households get hooked (up) to clean energy in a region where 510mn people have no access to electricity and are unlikely to get grid access in the foreseeable future," said Ndiege.

Anna Jardfelt, an ambassador to Kenya from Sweden, one of the governments funding REACT, said she was happy to see women and girls, in particular, getting basic access to electricity through the programme.

"Through a regional approach we hope that the new business models developed in East Africa, providing electricity to millions of people far from the grid, will rapidly be taken up in West Africa and promote learning across the continent," she said.

Party leaders to press Zuma to step down

Reuters
Johannesburg

The six most powerful officials in South Africa's ruling African National Congress (ANC) were to meet President Jacob Zuma late yesterday, a senior party leader said, amid growing pressure for the 75-year-old leader to step down.

Zuma, who is battling corruption allegations, has been in a weakened position since he was replaced as leader of the ANC in December by Cyril Ramaphosa, the deputy president.

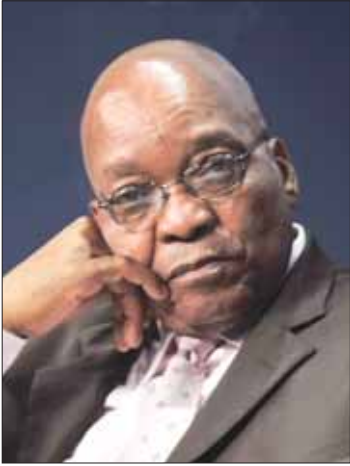
The party's "top-six" leadership team was to meet Zuma late yesterday, party secretary-general and top-six member Ace Magashule told local media including news channel eNCA and the *City Press* newspaper.

Magashule said that the removal of Zuma as president of the country was not on the agenda, differing with reports citing unnamed sources in the *City Press* and *Sunday Times* newspapers that the leaders would ask the president to resign.

There was no immediate comment from an ANC spokeswoman.

Ramaphosa is in pole position to win an election next year and many in the party want Zuma out so that Ramaphosa can embark on his anti-corruption agenda. It was unclear if Ramaphosa would be at the meeting which the *Sunday Times* said was due to be held in Pretoria.

The ANC leader was in the northern province of Limpopo to urge traditional leaders to support the



Zuma ... under a cloud

party in next year's election.

In public remarks at the event, Ramaphosa did not say if he would be part of the meeting with Zuma, who has been deserted by several prominent allies in the ANC since Ramaphosa took leadership of what is the only party to govern South Africa since the end of apartheid.

Paul Mashatile, a top-six member, told CNBC Africa on Friday the president should step down to avoid two centres of power and his removal via a motion of no-confidence or impeachment.

"It's really anyone's guess as to what will come out of the meeting but Zuma's days in the office

can definitely be counted in weeks, not months," said Jakkie Cilliers, an analyst with the Institute for Security Studies, a Pretoria-based think tank.

Zuma, who has not said whether he will step down voluntarily before his second term as president ends, has been deserted by several prominent allies in the ANC since Ramaphosa took over leadership of what is the only party to govern South Africa since the end of apartheid.

He is due to deliver a speech at the opening of parliament in Cape Town on Thursday, Magashule told eNCA news channel.

It is unclear if he would still be office to face a fresh no-confidence motion on February 22.

Zuma has survived several no-confidence votes during his rule thanks to loyal voting by ANC lawmakers, who form a strong parliamentary majority.

Although Zuma retains the support of a faction within the ANC, he no longer holds a top post.



President Alpha Conde of Guinea waves after casting his vote yesterday outside the polling station in Conakry.

Guinea holds first local vote since military rule

AFP
Conakry

Guinea began voting yesterday in the first local elections since the end of the era of military dictatorship following eight years of delays.

The municipal council elections, originally scheduled for 2010, have been repeatedly delayed due to a lack of funds, political infighting and the 2013-2016 Ebola crisis.

Failing schools, unemployment, electricity shortages and corruption allegations are all election issues in the West African country.

"This is the first time I have voted for a mayor. I hope my candidate wins and puts in place his programme to clean up our district, create employment and make our city safe," said taxi driver Simbaya Aboulaye Sou-

mah in the capital Conakry.

But some voters have vowed to stay at home. "It's just a load of noise," Salimatou Sow, a market vendor, told AFP.

"Once they are elected, they will forget all their promises, make themselves rich off the back of the people and forget rubbish collection, street cleaning, and job creation," she added.

Guinea gained independence from France under "father of independence" turned paranoid dictator Ahmed Sekou Toure, who ruled until his death in 1984.

Authoritarian General Lansane Conte then seized power in a coup.

Following his death in 2008, the military took control until a transition to civilian rule when President Alpha Conde was elected in 2010.

More than 5.9mn Guineans are registered to vote in the polls from 7am.

In 2005, under General Conte's rule, the ruling party took 80% of the vote and consequently the vast majority of voting districts.

Due to the lack of elections, council executives have been controversially replaced with appointees named by Conde, who will now face scrutiny in Guinea's democracy for the first time.

An agreement reached in October 2016 between the government, opposition, civil society and international partners paved the way for elections in February 2017.

But despite huge opposition demonstrations demanding President Alpha Conde respect the agreement, the vote timetable had repeatedly slipped.

About 60% of Guinea's population is 25 and under, with their memories of Conte and military rule hazy or non-existent.

Their priorities include improvements to Guinea's cash-

strapped education system and jobs to address sky-high youth unemployment.

Voters will choose councillors for 342 "communes" from 1,300 party lists representing almost 30,000 candidates, including around 7,000 women.

Ibrahima Camara, local campaign manager for the Union of Republican Forces (UFR) of former prime minister Sidya Toure, said the vote could be a "springboard" for Toure as he mounts a third attempt at the presidency in 2020.

The key battleground with Conde's ruling Rally for the Guinean People (RPG) will be in the western area of Kindia and southern city of N'Zerekore, which were heavily affected by Ebola.

Political distrust is high in Guinea, a mineral-rich but deeply poor country where ethnic tensions often turn deadly around election time.

Gridlock hurting business at Nigeria's busiest port

By **Joel Olatunde Agoi, AFP**
Lagos

Even okadas, the motorcycle-taxis that buzz fearlessly around Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, struggle to negotiate the road to Apapa – the country's busiest seaport.

Riders pick their way gingerly around giant potholes that resemble blast craters, and among the lines of stationary trucks perched at precarious angles on the rutted surface.

Getting to and from Apapa – the catch-all name for Lagos' two seaports of Apapa and Tin Can Island – has increasingly become a nightmare for pretty much everyone.

Now, with the chronic traffic jams hurting business and no sign of any swift resolution to the problem, labour unrest is looming large on the horizon.

The Maritime Workers Union of Nigeria (MWUN) has given the federal government an ultimatum: fix the roads or face an indefinite walk-out.

MWUN leader Adewale Adeyanju said an open-ended strike by its members would paralyse port activities but they had no alternative.

"The road is now a safe haven for criminals, who use every opportunity to attack, assault and rob innocent Nigerians, including our members, who trek to and from work daily on the road, because it is no longer motorable," he told AFP.



Commuters make their way through congested traffic in the port area of Lagos.

As well as security, he said shipping companies and businesses were increasingly using alternative berths such as those in Cotonou, in neighbouring Benin.

"While our neighbouring ports are booming, our ports have been deserted because of the failed access roads to the ports, the gateway to the nation's economy," said Adeyanju.

Union leaders are due to meet the labour minister in Abuja tomorrow.

But it's possible that even then, oil tanker drivers like John Chinedu will still be waiting on the dilapidated high-

way. "We have been at this same spot for the last four days and we've not been able to enter the port," he said.

Chinedu, though, is a recent arrival compared to Lekan Yinusa.

"It's been two weeks since we arrived in Lagos to help an importer carry his container that has been lying in the port for several weeks," he said.

"But we have not been able to because of the bad condition of the road. I go to the toilet, wash and even eat over there," he added, pointing to the side of the road.

The dismal state of the roads is all the more astonishing for a port that handles more than 60% of Nigeria's cargo and generates some 70% of customs revenue.

In 2017, duties totalled more than 1tn naira (\$2.8bn) – up from just under 900bn naira the previous year.

Jonathan Nicol, a Lagos-based importer, said the condition of the roads has had a knock-on effect on business, and spiralling costs had forced some to shut down.

"We are forced to pay extra charges and demurrage (when a ship's owner pays a penalty for not loading or discharging in time), which is not the fault of importers," he added.

"Manufacturers cannot get their raw materials on time. The delay leads to extra port charges which will be passed on to the final consumers in terms of high prices."

Shipping executive Lukman Busari

said Apapa's chronic traffic jams were not helped by the location of fuel depots around the ports.

"There are over 200 farm tanks with thousands of trucks waiting to load petroleum products at the ports, thereby creating gridlock on the roads," he said.

"To decongest the roads, the railway should be developed while pipeline distribution of petroleum product should be considered."

The managing director of the Nigeria Ports Authority, Hadiza Bala Usman, acknowledged the grievances, which come as Nigeria looks to boost growth after months of recession.

"There is no doubt that the deplorable state of the roads at Apapa is hurting businesses. We are not happy about the situation," she said.

The NPA last year contributed 1.8bn naira for road repairs and was pushing the government to do further work, despite it not being in the authority's remit.

"We are ready to do it because of its importance to our operations," she said, appealing to port users to bear with the authorities while the facilities are improved.

"We have to adopt a multi-transportational approach to move cargo to and from the ports. Right now, over 90% of cargo is moved through the roads, which is not too ideal. There is need to develop the railway and inland waterways as well."

Democrats sharpen rhetoric after disputed memo release

AFF
Washington

Democrats yesterday sharpened their rhetoric in the clash over the investigation into Trump campaign links to Russia, warning the president that firing top law enforcement officials could “lead to a confrontation we do not need in America.”

The warnings came two days after the Republican-led House intelligence committee released a declassified memo that claims that Democrat-funded research prompted the FBI to spy on a former Trump campaign aide, Carter Page.

Democrats stoutly resisted the memo's release, saying it was misleading, and possibly intended to lay the groundwork for President Donald Trump to fire senior officials and subvert the Russia meddling investigation led by Robert Mueller.

Dick Durbin, the number two Senate Democrat, yesterday warned against any such move.

“The question at that moment is whether or not the majority Republicans in the House and the Senate will stand up for the rule of law and the Constitution if the president takes that extreme position,” Durbin said on CNN's *State of the Union*.

“If the president takes this extreme action, I'm afraid that it could lead to a confrontation we do not need in America.”

House panel to take up Democratic memo today

The US House Intelligence Committee will consider today whether to release the Democratic rebuttal to a Republican memo alleging bias at the FBI and Justice Department against President Donald Trump, two sources told Reuters.

The panel, which on Friday released the Republican document, will decide whether to declassify the Democratic memo, which Democrats say highlight flaws and other shortcomings in the Republican account.

The committee will meet at 5pm EST to vote on whether to make the second document public, one of the sources said.

Democrats contend the Republicans mischaracterised highly sensitive classified information that was used to justify the extension of surveillance against a former Trump campaign aide.

Both he and the ranking Democrat on the intelligence committee, Representative Adam Schiff, contested the suggestion that the FBI's request to a special court for authority to surveil Page failed to note that it was based in part on a dossier paid for by Democrats.

“The court was notified there was a political actor involved,” Schiff said. “The goal here is to undermine the FBI, discredit the FBI, discredit



Protesters rally in support of a permanent legislative solution for immigrants in Los Angeles on Saturday.

the Mueller investigation, do the president's bidding,” he said on ABC's *This Week*.

He said it was “very possible” committee Republicans had “co-ordinated the whole effort with the White House.”

Trump tweeted on Saturday that the memo “vindicated” his insistence that there was “no collusion and there was no obstruction.”

But some Republicans, while

supporting the gist of the memo, took pains to show support for Mueller, deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein and FBI chief Christopher Wray at a time the FBI and Justice Department are facing almost unprecedented criticism from the president.

“I've had my differences with Rod Rosenstein, and I still think that he is fully capable of helping run a Justice Department that we

can all have confidence in,” said Representative Trey Gowdy, chairman of the House Oversight Committee, on CBS's *Face the Nation*.

And Representative Will Hurd, a Republican on the intelligence committee, told ABC, “I want to stress Bob Mueller should be allowed to turn over every rock, pursue every lead so we can have trust knowing what Russia did or didn't do.”

Paul Ryan deletes tax cut tweet after widespread mockery

DPA/Reuters
Washington

US Senate Speaker Paul Ryan has deleted a tweet after being widely mocked for claiming that a secretary's \$1.50-a-week pay rise was evidence of the success of his Republican party's tax overhaul.

Quoting a report by news agency AP, Ryan wrote: “A secretary at a public high school in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, said she was pleasantly surprised her pay went up \$1.50 a week...she said (that) will more than cover her Costco membership for the year.”

Democrats, who have criticised last year's tax reforms as mainly benefiting the super rich, were quick to jump on the tweet as evidence that Ryan was out of touch with normal people.

“Paul Ryan deleted his embarrassing tweet of a blatant admission because he and Republicans don't want you to know the truth: the

#GOPTaxScam is a gift to corporate America and the top 1% at your expense,” Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi tweeted.

“He also doesn't want you to know he got \$500,000.00 from the Koch family,” she added, referring to a reported campaign donation received

by Ryan from the billionaire Koch brothers just days after the tax overhaul was passed.

Other Twitter users also joined in the mockery.

“Charles, a Koch brother in Wichita, said he was pleasantly surprised that his pay went up \$26,923,076 a week...he said (that) will more than cover the cost of buying several more Paul Ryans,” LOLGOP wrote on Twitter..

“Wells Fargo, fresh off of defrauding millions of Americans, gets \$3.4bn,” tweeted Minnesota congressman Keith Ellison.

Meanwhile Randy Bryce, a Democrat hoping to unseat Ryan in Wisconsin, saw the blunder as a campaigning opportunity.

“Moments ago, @PRyan deleted this tweet after we told him just how out of touch he was...Chip in \$1.50 now to help us repeal and replace Ryan permanently this November,” Bryce tweeted.

The tax bill slashes the federal corporate tax rate from 35% to 21%, and the maximum individual income tax rate, for the nation's wealthiest, drops from 39.6% to 37%.

It also doubles the standard deduction for families, and doubles the child tax credit, while eliminating or limiting several deductions that millions of middle-class families currently claim.

Deadline looming for Boeing to decide on Canada fighter jet bid

Reuters
Ottawa

Boeing Co must decide by the end of this week whether to take part in a multi-billion-dollar race to supply Canada with fighter jets, even as the US company's relationship with Ottawa has soured due to a trade dispute.

Although a US trade commission on January 26 dismissed Boeing's complaint that Canadian plane maker Bombardier was dumping airliners on the American market, it is far from certain the ruling will be enough to placate Canada. That could well influence the company's decision on bidding on a contract for 88 jets worth between C\$15bn (\$12.1bn) and C\$19bn, people familiar with the matter said.

Boeing chief executive Dennis Muilenburg said in a post earnings call last week the company will wait to see the commission's reasoning, coming later this month, “to make decisions on our path forward.” The company declined to comment further.

Boeing has until February 9 to express an interest in taking part in the Canadian jet competition, failing which it will be excluded from the bidding process. At stake could be billions of dollars of defence procurement orders at a time when Canada is ramping up military spending over the next decade. Boeing says it supports some 17,000 jobs in Canada.

The dispute also has weighed on the crucial NAFTA modernisation talks, which have dragged on for months.

Although government officials say the competition will be open, they have privately made it clear that Boeing needs to drop the Bombardier chal-

lenge and talk of an appeal to stand a better chance of winning the jet contract, say sources familiar with the matter.

“A lot of things would be better if they did that,” said one source who declined to be identified given the sensitivity of the situation.

There are signs the relationship between Boeing and Ottawa remain frosty.

Boeing did not send its own staff to a meeting between the Canadian government and industry held in January to discuss the jets contract, the sources said.

Boeing said its F-18 Super Hornet was represented by the US Defense Security Co-operation Agency, the Pentagon unit that implements foreign arms sales. US foreign military sales are often negotiated between the US government and each customer nation.

Lockheed Martin Corp, Dassault Aviation SA and Airbus SE also are expected to compete.

Canada is part of the consortium that helped develop Lockheed's F-35 stealth fighter, although Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said during his successful 2015 election campaign that he would not buy the plane because it was too expensive.

Canadian Defence Minister Harjit Sajjan, who has said Boeing has not behaved like a trusted partner, did not answer directly last week when repeatedly pressed as to how the aerospace giant could get back into Ottawa's good books.

Ottawa says the bids will be evaluated in part on the basis of “past and recent economic behaviour of potential bidders leading up to the procurement.”

That test is months away from being finalised, meaning Boeing has no idea whether Ottawa would be satisfied if it did drop the challenge, sources said.

Experts warn citizenship query could hamper 2020 census

AFF
Washington

The United States is gearing up to conduct its next population census in 2020 but a thorny question on citizenship has ignited controversy even before it has begun.

When the decennial national headcount gets under way, census takers may have to ask respondents if they are US citizens, which observers say would discourage some ethnic minorities from participating and undermine the accuracy of the data.

Arturo Vargas, head of the NALEO Educational Fund, said surveys have shown as recently as September that test respondents are now experiencing “unprecedented fear of the US government.”

President Donald Trump took office on a nationalist anti-immigrant agenda, linking foreigners and migration to terrorism, crime and lost jobs.

In his State of the Union address last month, he reiterated his pledge to cut legal immigration and beef up enforcement.

In this heated environment, with frequent reports of immigrants tearfully torn from their families and deported, large segments of the population could refuse to participate in the census, out of fear authorities could use the information against them, critics say.

In December, the Justice Department kicked up a storm when it asked to have a question on nationality added to the survey conducted by the Census Bureau, which is a part of the Commerce Department.

The Justice Department argued that citizenship information would help enforce the Voting Rights Act, however that law is aimed at prohibiting racial discrimination at the ballot box.

Only US citizens are allowed to register to vote. But Trump has long claimed that millions of illegal immigrants voted in the 2016 presidential election, without providing proof.

“The Census Bureau is conducting a review of the DoJ request,” said Al Fontenot, associate director for census programs.

“We are focused on having the final list of questions submitted to the Congress by March 31.”

The debate over the questions and how they could affect response numbers is not just one of politics.

Required by the Constitution, the census determines the number of seats allotted to each state in the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of the US legislature.

Stanford sociology Professor C Matthew Snipp, the survey is “essential for American democracy.”

The population tally also impacts distribution of more than \$675bn in annual federal funding for schools, hospitals, roads and public services, according to the Census Bureau.

Under-reporting in some communities is a longstanding problem.

Analysts estimate that the 2010 census undercounted Latinos by 775,000 people.

The problem could be worse this time.

If minority populations, often concentrated in Democratic-leaning urban centres, do not fully participate, this could affect the balance of power in Congress.

“States like Texas, California, Arizona that have large Hispanic populations could lose seats in Congress if there is a very large undercount,” Snipp said.

And NALEO's Vargas warned that making a major last-minute change to the questionnaire would sabotage the Census Bureau's technical efforts to improve results and analysis.

Vargas said an imprecise census also could have economic and financial impacts.

The change also could increase the cost, currently estimated at \$15.6bn, up from \$12.9bn in 2010, due in part to the need for follow-up visits to convince members of the public to respond.

And businesses use the decennial survey to identify demographic trends and locate consumers and potential employees, allowing them to tailor planned investments, plan for factories and retail outlets, and convince banks to provide financing.

In 2010, the census counted 308.8mn Americans, an increase of 9.7% from 2000.

According to the latest estimates, the US population has since risen 5.8% to 327mn.

Amtrak train on wrong track in fatal SC crash



Investigators make their way around the train wreckage under the Charleston Highway overpass in Cayce, South Carolina.

Reuters
Cayce, South Carolina

An Amtrak passenger train apparently travelling on the wrong track collided yesterday with a parked CSX Corp freight train in South Carolina, killing two crew members and injuring at least 116 in the railroad's third fatal crash in as many months, authorities said.

Amtrak Train 91 was carrying 139 passengers and eight crew members to Miami from New York when it hit the freight train at about 2.35am local time near the state capital and derailed, the railroad said in a statement.

South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster said it appeared that the Amtrak train was on the wrong track when it slammed into the parked CSX freight train, which had no one aboard.

“It's a horrible thing to see, to understand what force was involved,” McMaster told a news conference. “The first engine of the freight train was torn up, and the single engine of the passen-

ger train is barely recognisable.”

The southbound passenger train's locomotive was lying on its side, and the first car was bent and also derailed, although it remained upright, according to images from the scene in the small city of Cayce, South Carolina.

At least four cars of the freight train, which was northbound before it was parked, were crumpled, looking like crushed tin foil, but remained on the tracks.

The passenger train was part of Amtrak' Silver Star Service, and the wreck occurred about 8km southwest of Columbia, the state capital.

Local media said some 5,000 gallons of fuel leaked as a result of the collision, but authorities said it was under control and no threat to public safety.

Identities of the two Amtrak employees killed were withheld pending notification of their families, officials said.

The number of injured rose to 116 from a previous count of 70, said Lexington County spokesman Harrison Cahill.

“The injuries range from

cuts and bruises to severe broken bones,” said Derrec Becker, public information officer for the South Carolina Emergency Management Division. “All the injured have been transported to local hospitals.”

President Donald Trump was getting regular updates on the crash while at his resort in Palm Beach, Florida.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with everyone that has been affected by this incident,” said a White House spokeswoman.

One priority is recovering data recorders from the Amtrak train that will indicate its speed upon impact, National Transportation Safety Board chairman Robert Sumwalt told Fox News.

NTSB investigators were headed to the scene.

Governor McMaster said he had been told the Amtrak train's speed was about 95kph upon impact but said the NTSB would investigate.

The Lexington County Sheriff's Department said a shelter for passengers was set up at a nearby middle school. Everyone was off

the train, and the Red Cross was assisting them, the department said on its website.

Derek Pettaway, a passenger in one of Train 91's rear carriages, told CNN he was sleeping as he headed for Orlando but was awakened by the impact.

He said the crew came through the cars “really quickly” and got everybody off the train.

“Nobody was panicking,” said Pettaway, who was discharged from a hospital with minor whiplash. “I think people were more in shock than anything else.”

Officials from Amtrak and the sheriff's department were not immediately available for comment.

By midmorning, fire and emergency personnel had scaled back their presence at the scene, but law enforcement and Amtrak officials remained there, Cahill said.

In December, three people were killed when an Amtrak passenger train derailed in Washington state. In late January, an Amtrak train carrying Republican members of the US Congress killed one person in a garbage truck with which it collided in Virginia.



N Korea slams Trump’s ‘sinister’ Union address

AFP
Seoul

North Korea hit back at US President Donald Trump yesterday after he slammed rights abuses under the hermit regime in his State of the Union address, with Pyongyang describing the speech as “screams of Trump terrified” by the North’s power.

The comments follow months of fiery rhetoric between the two countries that have seen tensions soar, with Trump drawing criticism at home for repeatedly using highly-menacing language towards the reclusive state.

During Wednesday’s address, he criticised the “cruel dictatorship” of Kim Jong-un and the leader’s “reckless pursuit” of atomic weapons while vowing to wage “a campaign of maximum pressure” to derail the nuclear threat.

Kim declared his country a fully-fledged nuclear power last November after testing an intercontinental ballistic missile Pyongyang claimed is capable of reaching the US mainland.

Trump also lashed out at widespread human rights abuses under the regime and highlighted the case of Otto Warmbier, an American student who died last year shortly after being released from a 17-month-long detention in North Korea.

A spokesperson of the North’s foreign ministry yesterday said the speech reflected “the height of Trump-style arrogance, arbitrariness and self-conceit,” in a statement carried by the state-run KCNA news agency.

“Trump also insisted upon the ‘maximum pressure’ against our country, viciously slandering our most superior people-centred social system,” the statement added.



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un attends the trial of a trackless tramway in Pyongyang.

“However, it is no less than screams of Trump terrified at the power of the DPRK that has achieved the great historic cause of completing the state nuclear force and rapidly emerged as the strategic state recognised by the world,” it said, using the North’s official name.

Also in his address, Trump honoured Ji Seong-ho, a North Korean defector with only one arm and one leg who made a dramatic, 6,000-mile journey to the South after suffering severe dis-

crimination and torture at home.

The North claimed Trump’s comment revealed a “sinister intention to do something against us by relying on strength while talking about ‘American resolve.’”

“If Trump does not get rid of his anachronistic and dogmatic way of thinking, it will only bring about the consequence of further endangering security and future of the United States,” the foreign ministry said.

Relations between the two

countries reached fresh lows last year with the North launching a series of missiles and staging its most powerful nuclear test to date, in a challenge to Trump who has threatened to “utterly destroy” the regime in the event of an attack.

Kim and Trump have at the same time traded colourful personal barbs against each other, sparking global alarm and fears of further fighting on the peninsula that was left in ruins after the 1950-53 Korean War.

But in a move that seemed aimed at easing tensions and after months of persuasion from Seoul, the North last month said it would send its athletes to the Winter Olympics, due to kick off in the South on Friday.

Some have already arrived in South Korea. Analysts have described the potential momentum for peace as too fragile, saying it may not be sustainable after the Games given the North’s repeated declarations of nuclear statehood.

N Korea’s ceremonial head of state to visit South: Seoul

North Korea’s ceremonial head of state will visit the South this week in connection with the Winter Olympics, Seoul said late yesterday. The trip by Kim Yong-nam will be the diplomatic high point of the rapprochement between the two Koreas triggered by the Pyeongchang Games in the South, which have their opening ceremony on Friday.

Tensions spiralled last year as the North carried out multiple weapons tests, including intercontinental ballistic missiles it says are capable of reaching the mainland United States, and its most powerful nuclear blast to date. For months, it ignored Seoul’s entreaties to take part in a “peace Olympics”, until leader Kim Jong-un indicated his willingness to do so in his New Year speech.

That set off a rapid series of meetings which saw the two agree to march together in the opening ceremony and form a unified women’s ice hockey team, their first for 27 years. The North’s Olympic participation would include a visit by a high-level delegation, they agreed.

It will be led by Kim Yong-nam, who is leader of the Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, the North’s ruling-party-controlled parliament, Seoul’s unification ministry said in a statement. Kim – who is not a close blood relative of leader Kim Jong-un – will arrive on Friday for a three-day visit, accompanied by three other officials and 18 support staff, the ministry said it had been told by Pyongyang.

The South Korean ministry did not explicitly say whether Kim would attend the Pyeongchang opening ceremony.

Protests over joint Korean hockey team

Angry demonstrators stamped on a picture of North Korean leader Kim Jong-un as a joint North and South Korean women’s ice hockey team came together for the first time, losing 3-1 to Sweden in a practice match. The unified team for the Pyeongchang Olympics is a product of a landmark deal between the two rivals following a year of high tensions over the nuclear-armed North’s weapons ambitions. But the addition of North Korean players has provoked controversy in the South, with accusations that Seoul is depriving some of its own players of the chance to compete at a home Olympics for political purposes. The joint team of North and South Korean female hockey players tested the ice for the first time in a warm-up match against Sweden, five days before the Winter Games officially open.

The 3,000-capacity crowd roared as the team – including four North Koreans – glided onto the ice at the Seonhak International

Ice Rink in Incheon, wearing blue and red uniforms with KOREA emblazoned across their chests.

But outside the arena, security was tight as protesters faced off with supporters of the joint team, highlighting sharp divisions over the initiative.

Those in favour of the North Korean presence chanted “Peace Olympics”, while protesters just across the street shouted “Pyongyang Olympics,” suggesting the North had been allowed to hijack the Pyeongchang Games. Dozens of protesters yelled criticisms of the North into speakers, trampling on a picture of leader Kim and ripping up blue and white unification flags. “As a coach, it is hard to tell some of your players that you have been with for quite a long time that they are not going to be able to play, but the whole situation is out of our control. So we are trying to make the best out of it,” said Sarah Murray, South Korea’s Canadian coach.

Four workers killed, one injured after crane collapse in Jakarta

Four workers were killed and another injured after a crane collapsed on a railway track construction site in East Jakarta early yesterday, the Antara state news agency reported. The crane was lifting rail pads for a double-track railway project at 5am when it suddenly collapsed. Two workers died at the scene, while the two others died in the hospital. East Jakarta police chief Yoyon Tony Surya Putra said police were questioning witnesses

who were on the scene at the time. Police are also investigating whether the crane collapsed as a result of negligence, Antara reported. Box girders at a light rapid transit (LRT) construction site in East Jakarta collapsed and injured five workers last month, while a crane at a LRT construction project in the Kelapa Gading area of North Jakarta fell on top of a shophouse in October 2017, leaving the building partly damaged.

Tesla, Australia to turn 50,000 homes into power generators

AFP
Sydney

Some 50,000 homes in South Australia will receive solar panels and Tesla batteries, the state government announced yesterday, in a landmark plan to turn houses into a giant, interconnected power plant.

South Australia is already home to world’s biggest battery in an Elon Musk-driven project to provide electricity for more than 30,000 homes.

The state government has since been looking for more ways – particularly through renewables – to address its energy woes after an “unprecedented” storm caused a state-wide blackout in 2016.

Under a new plan unveiled yesterday, a network of solar panels linked to rechargeable batteries will be provided free to households and financed by the sale of excess electricity generated by the network, the government said.

“My government has already delivered the world’s biggest battery, now we will deliver the world’s largest virtual power plant,” state Premier Jay Weatherill said in a statement. “We will use people’s homes as a way to generate energy for the South Australian grid, with participating households benefiting with

significant savings in their energy bills.” A trial phase will begin with 1,100 public housing properties, each supplied with a 5kW solar panel system Tesla battery.

Following the trial, the systems will be installed at a further 24,000 public housing properties before the scheme is opened up to other South Australians over the next four years. The government is also set to look for an energy retailer to deliver the programme to add more competition to the market.

The rollout will be supported by the state government through a A\$2mn (US\$1.6mn) grant and a A\$30mn loan from a taxpayer renewable technology fund. Tesla said in a statement to AFP that the virtual power plant would have 250 megawatts of solar energy and 650 megawatt hours of battery storage. “At key moments, the virtual power plant could provide as much capacity as a large gas turbine or coal power plant,” the company added.

Australia is one of the world’s largest producers of coal and gas but the South Australian blackout raised questions about its energy security. Several ageing coal-fired power plants have closed, while strong demand for gas exports and a rise in onshore gas drilling bans have fuelled concerns of a looming domestic energy shortage in the next few years.

Spectacle in the sky



A Royal Thai Air Force (RTAF) SAAB JAS 39 Gripen fighter aircraft performs an aerial display during a media preview for the Singapore Airshow in Singapore.



A South Korean Air Force Black Eagles aerobatic team performs an aerial display during a media preview for the Singapore Airshow.



An Indonesian Air Force (TNI-AU) Jupiter aerobatic team performs an aerial display at the Singapore Airshow.

Australia won’t fund mega Adani mine rail link

AFP
Sydney

Embattled Indian miner Adani’s plans for a massive coal project in Australia has been dealt another blow after the government confirmed yesterday it would not fund a rail link to the facility.

The development of the controversial US\$16bn Carmichael mine near the Great Barrier Reef is set to be one of the world’s

largest. But it has been delayed by several years amid regulatory and legal hurdles.

While a lease was granted in 2016, Adani is still seeking to secure funding for the first stage of a A\$1bn (US\$790mn) government loan for a vital 189-km rail line linking the mine to a port. But government frontbencher Karen Andrews said such a loan would not be forthcoming from Canberra amid opposition from the state government.

“For there to be money avail-

able through NAIF (Northern Australia Infrastructure Fund), that will require the support of the Queensland (state) Labor government,” Liberal MP Andrews told Sky News Australia. “They are not going to provide that, so the advice that I’ve been given from the resources minister is that the financing will not proceed.”

The Queensland Labor government campaigned against the rail loan last year in state elections. Andrews said she was

hopeful the project would still go ahead, adding that the mine “is actually very, very important for employment and jobs in the northern part of Australia”.

Several global banks have already said they would avoid the project amid a growing shift away from investing in fossil fuels.

There was no immediate comment from Adani Australia. Adani last year cancelled a conditional A\$2bn contract with mining services giant Downer to

develop and run the mine, saying it would manage the mine on its own to keep costs down. The mega mine is opposed by environmentalists, who claim it will harm the World Heritage-list Barrier Reef – already threatened by climate change – off Australia’s northeastern coast.

The Indian conglomerate forecasts it will produce 60mn tonnes of thermal coal a year for export and estimates it will generate 10,000 direct and indirect jobs.

Publishers call on Man Booker prize to drop US authors

Guardian News and Media
London

Tensions over the decision to allow US authors to enter the Man Booker prize have flared up yet again, with 30 publishers signing a letter urging the prize organisers to reverse the change, or risk a “homogenised literary future”.

The letter, which was intended to be private and has been seen by the Guardian, argues that the rule change to allow any writer

writing in English and published in the UK to enter has restricted the diversity of the prize and led to the domination of American authors since it came into effect in 2014.

Previously, the prize only allowed citizens from Commonwealth countries and the Republic of Ireland to enter.

“The rule change, which presumably had the intention of making the prize more global, has in fact made it less so, by allowing the dominance of Anglo-American writers at the expense of oth-

ers; and risks turning the prize, which was once a brilliant mechanism for bringing the world’s English-language writers to the attention of the world’s biggest English-language market, into one that is no longer serving the readers in that market ... (It) will therefore be increasingly ignored,” the letter claims.

Mark Richards, publisher at John Murray, confirmed that the letter had not yet been sent to the trustees of the Booker Foundation. “There is a letter circulating that we hope, once sent,

will start a constructive discussion with the Booker Foundation,” he said.

Responses to the rule change have been varied since it came in. When it was first announced, author Philip Hensher wrote: “I don’t think I’ve ever heard so many novelists say, as over the last two or three days, ‘Well, we might as well just give up, then.’”

Julian Barnes, who won the Booker in 2011, branded the change “straightforwardly daft”; broadcaster Melvyn Bragg said the prize might lose its dis-

tinctiveness; and Susan Hill, who judged the prize twice and was shortlisted once, wrote: “Not sure I can see a reason for this. Why can’t we have a prize of our own?”

But others have been supportive. Nobel winner Kazuo Ishiguro, who won the 1989 prize, said “the world has changed and it no longer makes sense to split up the writing world in this way”.

Alastair Niven, a prize judge in 2014, said: “I don’t think that writers in this country have any reason to be paranoid or timid

about competition from the US. They should welcome the challenge. If American literary awards don’t include British writing then more fool them. It’s just another example of America First. Surely we don’t want to encourage a Britain First mentality here.”

Since the rule was changed in 2014, there have been two US winners: George Saunders in 2017 for Lincoln in the Bardo, and Paul Beatty in 2016, for his satirical novel *The Sellout*. The other two winners – Richard

Flanagan and Marlon James – are Australian and Jamaican, respectively.

Arguing that the rule change “isn’t even popular in America,” the letter refers to a 2017 article by *Washington Post* critic Ron Charles, who wrote in a piece titled “Dear Britain, Please Take Your Booker Prize Home”: “For any serious reader of fiction in this country, the Americanisation of the Booker prize is a lost opportunity to learn about great books that haven’t already been widely heralded.”

Tory county council runs out of cash to meet obligations

Guardian News and Media
London

A Conservative-run county council has signalled it is close to effective bankruptcy after admitting that “severe financial challenges” mean it is unable to meet its financial obligations in the current year.

Northamptonshire county council has issued a Section 114 notice imposing financial controls and banning expenditure on all services except for its statutory obligations to safeguard vulnerable people.

A Section 114 notice is effectively an admission that a council does not have resources to meet current expenditure, that its financial reserves are depleted and that it has little confidence that it can bring spending under control in the near future. It is understood Northamptonshire is the first local authority to issue a Section 114 notice for two decades.

The news comes weeks after the Local Government Association (LGA) warned that years of shrinking budgets, coupled with increased pressure on social care and child protection services, would leave many councils “close to the edge”. The LGA estimates that councils in England face an overall funding gap of £5.8bn by 2020. Although councils cannot technically go bankrupt, a Section 114 may force central government to intervene to ensure that local services are sustainable.

The council said: “The notice has been served in light of the severe financial challenge facing the authority and the significant risk that it will not be in a position to deliver a balanced budget by the end of the year.”

“Councillors have 21 days to discuss the implications of the Section 114 notice and this is due to be addressed at the full council meeting on February 22. The notice does not affect staff pay and the council will continue to meet its statutory functions.”

Northamptonshire revealed in December that it would increase council tax by 5% in 2018-19 while cutting its spending by £34mn. Councillors said this was necessary to meet soaring demand for services at a time when central funding was being slashed.

It is understood that the council is facing a £10mn overspend on its budget this year, mainly driven by rising demand in adult social care services. The financial situation has been exacerbated by forecasts that £27mn of hoped-for savings this year have failed to materialise.

Andrew Gwynne, the shadow secretary of state for communities and local government, said: “The failure of this Tory-run council shows that their approach to managing our public services doesn’t work.”

“There have been deeply worrying reports for a number of months that this council was failing in its duty to the people of Northamptonshire – and now these people will pay the price for this negligence.”

An independent investigation into alleged financial and governance failings at the council was announced by the Communities and Local Government Secretary, Sajid Javid, last month.

A spokesperson for the ministry of housing, communities and local government said: “It would not be appropriate for us to comment while the inspection is ongoing.”



Home Secretary Amber Rudd appears on the BBC's Andrew Marr Show yesterday.

Cabinet united on Brexit trade strategy: Rudd

Guardian News and Media
London

Amber Rudd has tried to quell threats by Brexiters of a challenge to Theresa May’s leadership following reports that Eurosceptic MPs are getting ready to move against the prime minister if she tries to keep the UK in a customs union.

After claims that Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Jacob Rees-Mogg could form a “dream team” to stop the prime minister’s alleged plan, reported in the *Sunday Times*, the home secretary said the government would come forward with proposals which would

command support across the House of Commons.

“I have a surprise for the Brexiters which is the (Cabinet) committee that meets in order to help make these decisions is more united than they think,” she told BBC’s *Andrew Marr Show*.

“We meet in the committee. We meet privately for discussions. I think that we will arrive at something which suits us all. There will be choices to be made within that but we all want the same thing which is to arrive at a deal which works for the UK.”

The damaging row has flared up after the prime minister did not rule out such an ar-

rangement, which would limit Britain’s ability to reach free trade agreements with non-EU countries, but failed to say what she thought should happen.

Tensions are running high before a crucial week for Brexit, during which the prime minister and key Cabinet ministers will meet over two days to hammer out details of a final deal that can keep all Tory factions on board.

Asked about a customs union, May told Sky News on Friday: “What I want to do is ensure that we have got the best possible trade arrangements with China and with other countries around the world once we have left the European Union.”

The *Sunday Times* reported that Johnson had told plotters he would be ready for a future contest and said “the cavalry is coming” to block a customs union plan when the Brexit cabinet committee meets this week.

It is understood that Johnson does plan to argue against a customs union this week but has no plans to challenge May and still openly backs her.

Some Brexiters MPs have confirmed to the *Guardian* that they are hoping that, at some point, the foreign secretary will form a team with Gove, the environment secretary alongside Rees-Mogg, the leading figure in the Economic

Research Group (ERG).

It is understood that Rees-Mogg has distanced himself from reports of a pact with Gove and Johnson.

Rudd acknowledged that a deal would probably involve some form of customs “arrangement” or “partnership” with the EU, but said May had an “open mind” as to how that could be achieved.

“We want frictionless trade at the border, we want to make sure that there is no border on the island of Ireland and we want to make sure that we can do trade deals outside of the European Union. That is the deal we are looking for,” she said.

Tory Brexiters likened to snake oil sellers

Guardian News and Media
London

The former Cabinet secretary Gus O’Donnell has compared Brexit ministers and MPs to snake oil sellers after sustained attacks upon senior civil servants for lacking impartiality.

Lord O’Donnell, who served under Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron, said attacks on Whitehall officials were “completely crazy” and “ridiculous”.

His comments follow claims by the Brexit minister Steve Baker, who rubbish government forecasts, and prominent Tory Brexiter Jacob Rees-Mogg, who accused the Treasury of “fiddling the figures” to show Britain would be worse off outside the EU, whatever the outcome of the negotiations.

O’Donnell said honesty and objectivity ran through the core of civil servants “like a stick of rock”, and the forecasts which came from Whitehall would have been made in good faith.

“(Civil servants) look at the

evidence and we go where it is,” he said. “Of course if you are selling snake oil, you don’t like the idea of experts testing your products.”

“And I think that’s what we’ve got, this backlash against evidence and experts is because they know where the experts will go.”

Responding to claims officials distorted their analysis, the former civil servant told ITV’s *Peston On Sunday show*: “I think that’s completely crazy. The truth is civil servants operate by the civil service code. The values are honesty, objectivity, integrity, impartiality.”

“Their job is to look at the evidence and present it as best they can, analyse the uncertainties ... but that’s what they do, they’re objective and impartial.”

“And I think what you find is that tends to get accepted very nicely when it agrees with someone’s prior beliefs, but actually, when someone doesn’t like the answer, quite often they decide to shoot the messenger.”

Nigel Lawson, who was chancellor under Margaret Thatcher, also recently claimed that officials

would attempt to frustrate Brexit because they were opposed to “radical change”.

On Saturday, a predecessor of O’Donnell accused Brexiters who blame civil servants for trying to sabotage Britain’s withdrawal from the EU of using tactics similar to those of rightwing German nationalists during the two world wars.

“‘Dolchstoss’ means ‘stab in the back,’ Lord Turnbull told the *Observer*. “After World War I there was an armistice, but the German army was then treated as the losers. Then, at the start of the Nazi era, the ‘stab-in-the back’ theme developed.”

“It argued that ‘our great army was never defeated, but it was stabbed in the back by the civilians, liberals, communists, socialists and Jews’. This is what I think these critics are trying to do. They are losing the argument in the sense that they are unable to make their extravagant promises stick up, and so they turn and say: ‘Things would be OK if the civil service weren’t obstructing us.’”

Clowning around



Clowns perform as they arrive for the annual Grimaldi Memorial Service at the All Saints church in east London yesterday. The service takes place to celebrate the father of modern clowning, Joseph Grimaldi, who died in 1837.

One dead in cylinder blast at care home

Guardian News and Media
London

An elderly man has died and another person is critically injured after a fire thought to have been caused by an explosion at a residential care home.

Emergency crews were called to the Woodlands View in Stevenage, Hertfordshire, after a “minor explosion” caused by an oxygen cylinder. Eight fire engines were sent to the scene.

One resident, in his 80s, was in the room where the fire started and died later in hospital. Six other people were injured, including another resident who is in a critical condition.

Darryl Keen, chief fire officer and director of community protection at the Hertfordshire county council, said: “There were 41 people in the premises at the time of the fire, many of these self-evacuated but firefighters completed five rescues and assisted another 10 from the property. All 41 residents, staff and visitors, were assessed by the ambulance serv-

ice. The fire was out by 5pm.”

The home was acquired by HC-One in August 2017, and the council said it would continue to work with the provider to ensure the welfare of residents affected by the fire.

“The care home providers are doing everything possible to contact relatives of residents to keep them updated with the latest information,” an update on the council’s website said.

It added: “The joint response from all the emergency services has been commendable. An investigation into the cause of the fire will now be carried out. Our thoughts are with all those affected.”

Woodland View is a complex of six separate buildings with about 25 residents in each unit.

In June, when the home was owned by Bupa, an inspection by the Care Quality Commission found it “required improvement” in all areas including safety.

The CQC report said: “The service was not consistently safe. People’s individual risks were assessed, however, this was not consistent and some needs were not risk assessed.”

POLITICS



Ukraine opposition figure and former Georgia president Mikheil Saakashvili addresses supporters at a rally in Kiev yesterday.

CLEAR GOAL

Erdogan rejects option of partnership with EU

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has rejected proposals of a partnership with the EU, insisting full membership to the bloc is the only option, in an interview published yesterday. The EU must “keep its promises” to Turkey, Erdogan told Italy’s *Stampa* newspaper, ahead of his arrival in Rome yesterday evening for a 24-hour visit. “The EU is blocking access to negotiations and suggests that lack of progress is because of us. It’s unfair,” he said. “We want full membership. Other options are not satisfactory.” He stressed the country’s “important” role stemming the flow of migrants to Europe, which he said offered “security and stability” to the continent.



A father pulls his daughter up a flight of stairs in Kolomenskoye museum-reserve during a snowfall in Moscow yesterday.

WINTER FARE

Man killed as record snowfall hits Moscow

At least one person died and several were injured after Moscow experienced its heaviest day of snowfall since records began, the city’s mayor and agencies said yesterday. Russia’s meteorological service said Moscow had seen more than half its average monthly snowfall in the space of 24 hours, with 43cm blanketing the capital by yesterday morning, agencies reported. “One person died from a falling tree that hit an electric power line,” Moscow mayor Sergei Sobyanin said on his VKontakte social media page, adding that 2000 trees had already been brought down by the extreme weather. “Five have been injured. Weather will get worse.”

IMBROGLIO

Catalans urged to pick new leader who respects law

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy yesterday called on Catalan separatists to choose a regional leader who respects the law to replace exiled former leader Carles Puigdemont, who faces arrest if he returns to Spain. Addressing conservative Popular Party (PP) faithful in the southern town of Cordoba, Rajoy said he hoped the separatists would choose someone “who sees things another way and who says, ‘I am a political leader and that’s why I am going to respect the law, because it’s my obligation and that’s what happens in democratic countries.’” Puigdemont remains in self-imposed exile in Belgium and faces arrest if he returns to Spain.

Germany waits for outcome of coalition talks

Reuters
Berlin

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said yesterday that her conservatives faced tough negotiations with the Social Democrats (SPD) as they strive to form a ruling coalition, and it was unclear when they would be able to wrap up the talks.

More than four months after a national election, Europe’s largest economy and pre-eminent power broker is in political paralysis, causing concern among investors and partner countries that policymaking on issues such as Britain’s looming departure from the European Union and eurozone reform may be held up.

The conservatives and SPD had set themselves yesterday deadline to agree on renewing the “grand coalition” that has governed since 2013 but some politicians said the discussions could run into today or tomorrow.

Even then, SPD grassroots members will still need to vote on any deal.

“It’s not yet possible to say how long it will last – we did good groundwork yesterday but there are still important issues that need to be resolved,” Mer-

kel, in office for 12 years, said before heading into negotiations at the SPD headquarters.

Asked on ARD television if the negotiations could still fail, senior conservative Reiner Haseloff said: “I don’t think so. I hope not. I can’t think of any topic that is insurmountable.”

The parties agreed yesterday to invest more than 2bn euros in social housing by 2021, to spend up to 12bn euros on expanding broadband and to channel 33bn euros to municipalities for various projects including childcare.

They have also ticked off migration, energy and agriculture in recent days too but the most contentious issues – labour rules and healthcare have yet to be resolved.

As he arrived for talks, SPD leader Martin Schulz said the sides had edged closer on many issues but remained at odds over an SPD demand to abolish fixed-term employment contracts and its call to replace Germany’s dual public-private healthcare system with one insurance system for all.

Healthcare and labour policy are crucial for the SPD as it tries to convince its 443,000 members – many of whom oppose forming another

awkward partnership with Merkel after their party suffered its worst post-war result in September’s election.

“I think agreements are possible but they still haven’t been reached,” Schulz said. “Ultimately it’s necessary to take the time you need to create a stable foundation for a stable government.”

The conservatives have rejected SPD calls for sweeping reform of health insurance and talks are now expected to focus on improving public healthcare, such as by changing billing rules for doctors, who earn more by treating private patients.

In labour market policy, Merkel’s bloc does not want to ban fixed-term contracts, but has offered to prevent the repeated renewal of such contracts as a compromise.

SPD negotiator Manuela Schwesig, aware of the need to push through distinctive SPD policies to sell the deal to the party at large, said: “We’ve promised our members that we’ll negotiate until the other side squeals, and we’ll do that.”

The parties planned to negotiate until midnight and if they had not managed to conclude talks by then, they will resume at the SPD headquarters today, sources said.

Anastasiades set to win Cyprus vote

AFP
Nicosia

Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades yesterday won re-election at a run-off, exit polls said, seeing off a leftist challenger with vows to restart talks to unify the island and cement an economic recovery.

An estimate from state broadcaster CyBC said the conservative incumbent scooped between 54.5% and 59.5% of votes in the Greek-majority European Union member, ahead of Communist-backed Stavros Malas on 40.5%-45.5%.

Two other polls from private broadcasters gave similar figures.

Apathy has been on the rise after a lacklustre campaign – especially among young voters – and the final official turnout stood at 73%.

At one polling station in Nicosia the focus was firmly on reunification efforts and the economy.

“I voted for Anastasiades as I think he is the perfect choice to run the country at this time,” petrol station owner George Souglis, 73, told AFP. “In the future he will continue to do a lot on the economy and Cyprus problem.”

As ever, the nearly 44-year division of the eastern Mediterranean island between the internationally recognised Republic of Cyprus in the south and a Turkish-backed statelet in the north loomed large over the vote.

Anastasiades, 71, has pledged fresh

talks with Turkish Cypriot leader Mustafa Akinci despite the acrimonious collapse last July of UN-backed negotiations that came closer than ever to sealing a deal.

Dovish former health minister Malas, 50, had slammed his opponent for not going far enough to achieve a deal – but voters appeared unwilling to take the risk on the challenger.

Despite the promises of a new peace push, there is deep scepticism that any progress can be made to overcome issues including the presence of 40,000 Turkish troops in the north.

Relations between the Turkish and Greek Cypriot sides remain tense, and there is little sign that a nationalist government in Ankara will be willing to budge.

Carnival finery!



A masked reveller poses during the Venice Carnival yesterday.

‘Woman’s murder’ triggered Italy shooting

AFP
Macerata, Italy

A far-right supporter suspected of wounding six Africans in a shooting spree in central Italy said the “trigger” for his attacks was the murder of an Italian woman, allegedly by a Nigerian asylum seeker, according to media reports yesterday.

Luca Traini was arrested and taken into custody after drive-by attacks in the town of Macerata wounded five men and one woman from Ghana, Mali and Nigeria on Saturday.

It came a day after a Nigerian asylum-seeker and drug dealer was arrested in the same town for the murder of an 18-year-old woman, whose dismembered body was discovered in suitcases.

“I was driving to the gym when I heard on the radio about the 18-year-old girl,” daily newspaper *Corriere della Sera* quoted him as telling investigators.

“Instinctively I turned around, I went home, I opened the safe and took the pistol and decided to kill them all.”

After the shootings, Traini, 28, allegedly got out of his car, made a fascist salute with a tricolour Italian flag draped over his shoulders and shouted ‘Viva Italia’ and ‘Italy for Italians’, media reports said.

Police who raided his mother’s home

found far-right literature, including a copy of Adolf Hitler’s manifesto *Mein Kampf* and a book by fascist dictator Benito Mussolini.

Interior Minister Marco Minniti said the attack was part of a culture “of right-wing extremism with clear reference to fascism and Nazism” and deplored that the sole link between the victims was “the colour of their skin”.

He said the “criminal act” was prompted by “racial hatred” and had been prepared in advance.

The man allegedly opened fire in eight areas in the town and also targeted the office of the centre-left Democratic Party in a two-hour terror spree in the sleepy town of 43,000 people, press reports said.

One victim was seriously injured in the thorax, the reports said.

The other five had lesser injuries.

A Nigerian man who was shot in the thigh while buying cigarettes on the street, telling a television channel from his hospital bed that he was in great pain, adding: “It’s very serious.”

Traini is a member of the far-right anti-immigration Northern League party and had run in local elections last year.

Media reports said police found a gun in the man’s vehicle, a black Alfa Romeo.

“Someone who shoots is a delinquent, irrespective of the colour of his

skin,” said Northern league chief Matteo Salvini, ahead of legislative elections on March 4.

“I’m in a hurry to be in government to bring back security, social justice and serenity to Italy,” he said.

Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni meanwhile made a pitch for unity after Saturday’s incident, saying: “Hate and violence will not divide us.”

Italians head to the polls in national elections next month, with immigration shaping up to be a key issue.

The country is a favoured landing point on Europe’s southern coastline for migrants making the perilous journey across the Mediterranean, often aboard unseaworthy boats, to enter the continent.

But 2017 was a turning point for Italy: the country went from large-scale arrivals in the first six months to a sharp drop-off, thanks to controversial agreement between the EU and Libya.

Some 119,000 people landed in Italy last year, down 35% on 2016.

The Northern League is part of a populist coalition tipped to do well in the elections.

According to opinion polls, the alliance between ex-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi’s centre-right Forza Italia (Go Italy), the post-fascist Fratelli d’Italia (Italian Brothers) and the Northern League leads with more than 35% ahead of the March 4 vote.

Greeks rally in Athens over Macedonia name row



Greeks demonstrate to urge the government not to compromise in the festering name row with neighbouring Macedonia, in front of the parliament at the Syntagma Square in Athens.

Reuters
Athens

Hundreds of thousands of Greeks rallied yesterday outside parliament in Athens to protest against the use of the term Macedonia in any settlement the government pursues with the ex-Yugoslav Republic to end a decades-old name row.

The two countries have agreed to step up negotiations, mediated by the United Nations, this year to settle the dispute, which has frustrated the aspirations of Greece’s small northern neighbour to join Nato and the European Union.

Thoroughfares in central Athens turned into a sea of people waving blue and white Greek flags in what locals said was the largest gathering in decades, easily outdoing rallies against austerity foisted by leaders on the crisis-hit country.

Greece objects to Macedonia’s name because it has its own re-

gion called Macedonia, and argues that its neighbour’s use of the name, along with contentious articles in its constitution, imply territorial claims over Greek land.

Protesters hoisted a giant Greek flag over the demonstration with a crane on Sunday.

They held banners reading “Hands off Macedonia!” and chanted the national anthem.

“I’m here for Macedonia. Macedonia is ours, it’s part of Greece. We won’t let them take it from us,” said 72-year old Persefoni Platouri clutching a Greek flag.

The case evokes strong emotions among Greeks who consider Macedonia, the ancient kingdom ruled by Alexander the Great, to be an integral part of their homeland and heritage.

Talks also reopened at a sensitive time for a country which is struggling to emerge from its worst debt crisis in decades and to regain sovereignty over economic policy-making after years of austerity mandated by international lenders.

Among yesterday’s speak-

ers was world-renowned Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, who said the eight-year economic crisis had not wiped Greece’s history from people’s memories.

“If we give in, we are leaving the doors wide open for a tragic historical lie to come through and stay forever,” the 93-year-old leftist, a symbol of resistance against the 1967-1974 military junta, told a cheering crowd.

Talks between the two countries have been inconclusive since the Balkan state broke away from Yugoslavia in 1991.

Due to Greece’s objections, Macedonia was admitted to the United Nations with the provisional name “The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” in 1993, which remains its official title in international organisations. A majority of countries in the world refer to it simply as Macedonia.

Greece’s leftist-led government has proposed a compound name, with a geographical qualifier, which would be the only name that could be used for the country.

But opinion polls in recent

weeks have shown a majority of Greeks oppose the use of “Macedonia” in any solution.

About 300,000 people turned out at a demonstration on January 21 in Thessaloniki, capital of Greece’s Macedonia region.

The issue has also strained relations between Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ Syriza party and his small coalition ally, the right-wing Independent Greeks. The coalition government controls 154 seats in the 300-seat parliament.

The Macedonia issue helped bring down Greece’s conservative government in 1993; the same party, now in opposition, has criticised Tsipras’ administration for its negotiating tactics.

Foreign Minister Nikos Kotziaras said last week that Greece is preparing proposals which would be the basis of negotiations for a settlement with its neighbouring country.

“Here are the borders. This is Macedonia... Macedonia is Greek, no one can take this name, no one can use it,” said protester Rania Mainou, pointing on a map.

Delhi markets reopen after 2-day strike against sealing

IANSS
New Delhi

Markets in the national capital reopened yesterday after a two-day strike by thousands of commercial establishments protesting against the recent sealing drive by the municipal corporations of Delhi.

The shutdown had been called by the Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT).

“After two days of Delhi Trade Bandh called by CAIT against

sealing, the markets in Delhi opened today restoring the business activities to normal trade though markets observing Sunday as a weekly holiday remained closed,” the traders’ association said in a statement.

“The proposals of DDA (Delhi Development Authority) for amendment in Master Plan 2021 are very confusing since every proposal contains certain riders and conditions which are difficult to follow and as such the basic object of bringing proposals to provide relief to traders from sealing will be highly defeated, according

to prominent traders,” it said.

CAIT secretary-general Praveen Khandelwal said it appeared that the DDA proposals were drafted “in great haste without considering its compliance obligations and impact”.

“It will be more appropriate if the central government suspends the sealing by bringing a law in the parliament for at least six months, and during this period after having a detailed and thoughtful study, the proposals to amend the Master Plan should be drafted to give relief from sealing,” he said.

CAIT on Saturday said it has sent a “traders’ charter” to the government suggesting that it take necessary steps to mitigate traders’ problems on account of the sealing drive.

“Though appreciating the proposals mooted by DDA for amending the Master Plan to bring relief to traders from sealing, the CAIT has sent a 12-point traders’ charter to Hardeep Puri, union minister for Urban Development, urging him to take necessary steps to mitigate the problems of the traders on account of sealing,” it said.

On Friday, the DDA approved changes to the city’s Master Plan – in a move to provide relief to traders hit by the sealing drive – on a day hundreds of thousands of traders pulled down their shutters to protest against the sealing.

The sealing drive was being carried out against business establishments using residential areas for commercial purposes without paying conversion charges.

DDA’s proposed amendments to the Master Plan include increasing Floor Area Ratio (FAR)

of local shopping complexes from existing 180% to 300% and regularising agricultural warehouses on 12m-wide roads.

Though the DDA has approved the proposed amendments, the traders continued with their shutdown on Saturday.

According to the CAIT, the charter sent to the government includes among other steps keeping status quo in special areas till the time its redevelopment plan is prepared and implemented.

“The plot size in LSCs should be increased from 175m to

250m,” the traders’ body urged the government.

“While regularising and enhancing the FAR, the condition of parking availability should be withdrawn, three colonies - Greater Kailash, Green Park and South Extension – developed by DLF should be enlisted on the list of rehabilitation colonies developed by DLF,” the statement added.

CAIT also urged that commercial use of basements should be allowed uniformly in any street and the limit of paying conversion charges should be fixed for 10 years.

MP slams RS deputy chief on being called ‘mad’

IANSS
New Delhi

Rajya Sabha member of the Congress said he was feeling “depressed, dejected and ashamed” at being called “mad and a laughing stock” by the Chair on Friday, even though the remarks were later expunged.

In a letter to Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman P J Kurien, dated February 3, and shared with the media yesterday, Congress MP K V P Ramachandra Rao has lashed out at Kurien.

He said the use of those words were “not any humiliation for me but... certainly a great humiliation for the people of my state (Andhra Pradesh), who were agitating for fulfilment of their legitimate rights”.

On Friday, after the upper house of parliament met, Rao stood near the chairman’s podium, displaying a placard.

While a number of opposition members from various parties stood to the left of the podium raising the issue of police high-handedness against Muslims in Uttar Pradesh’s Kasganj, Rao stood silently on the right side, with his back to the Chair and flaunting the placard.

Rao was apparently expressing his displeasure at the alleged “continuous apathy” of the central government towards Andhra Pradesh and the non-implementation of the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act, 2014 in its “true spirit”.

The state that was bifurcated in 2014 had been seeking special development packages from the Centre.

As Rao stood near the podium, he caught the attention of Kurien who was presiding over the House. Kurien asked Rao to stop

but when the latter ignored his instructions, Kurien wondered if Rao had gone “mad” and was thus behaving this way.

Kurien also asked Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad to intervene and ask Rao to go back to his seat. However, Kurien had shortly afterwards expunged the word “mad” and its subsequent references from the records of the House.

In his letter, Rao wrote: “For the first time in life, I could not console myself last night with a deep feeling of depression and dejection and felt ashamed being the Member of Parliament who was compelled to stay a silent spectator during the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh in the name of parliamentary customs and conventions...”

“...And now being referred to by Chair as ‘mad and laughing stock’ solely because of democratically demanding the central government to implement the A P Reorganisation Act and fulfil the constitutional commitments made to the people of the state.”

After seeing the “apathy” of the central government towards Andhra Pradesh and its people during the last four years, “I wish I would have been mad rather than sitting idle in the House” witnessing the injustice being done to the state by the union government, which has the constitutional obligation to fulfil the promises made during the process of bifurcation, Rao said.

While Rao began his letter on a philosophical note, quoting Plato who called madness as the “divine release of the soul from the yoke of custom and convention”, the Congress MP concluded by saying that he wished to continue his fight for the rights of the people of his state and felt “proud even when termed as mad for the sake of people”.



BJP workers attend a rally addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bengaluru yesterday.

Throw out Congress govt in Karnataka: PM

IANSS
Bengaluru

It’s time for the Congress’ exit from Karnataka, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday, and urged the people of the state to throw the “corrupt and dynastic” party out of power in the upcoming assembly elections.

“Appeal to the people of Karnataka to throw the Congress government, as countdown for packing it off from the state has begun,” Modi said at a Bharatiya Janata Party rally at the sprawling Palace Grounds here.

Launching a no-holds-barred attack on the ruling party in his hour-long speech

in Hindi, Modi said the country did not any more need its “ruin-culture”.

“India does not need Congress culture anymore as it has ruined the nation. If corruption has to end, the state has to be made Congress-free,” he said.

Accusing Chief Minister Siddaramaiah’s government in the state of being “corrupt”, the prime minister said it has not been able to efficiently utilise the funds the central government had released during the last four years, while its parent party was opposing the path of development that the BJP was aiming for the nation.

“We have given the Karnataka government Rs2 lakh crore of funds, which is more than

180% of what the state got from the previous UPA government, which was only Rs73,000 crore,” Modi said.

The central government has also sanctioned 3.36 lakh houses under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, but the state government could only construct 38,000 so far, he said.

The Congress government has made way for builders’ mafia, sand mafia and other corrupt ways, he said.

Listing other beneficial steps for the state by his government, Modi said that nearly 8.5 lakh women from the state were given LPG connections through the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana and 1.16 crore bank accounts were opened for the poor

and lower middle-class citizens through Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana.

Modi also noted that his government had released Rs247 crore for the Swachh Bharat Mission to Karnataka, out of which Rs70 crore have still not been utilised.

“If (BJP state unit president) B S Yeddyurappa, the son of a farmer, becomes the chief minister, the projects for farmers will work at their best because he has their best interests at heart,” he said.

The BJP could take Karnataka to “new heights” with a focus on improving the lives of farmers in the state and creating better infrastructure, he said.

“There are still 7 lakh homes

in Karnataka which are in the dark with no access to electricity even years after independence. Electricity will brighten their lives,” Modi said.

The union budget’s announcement on suburban train network for Bengaluru could benefit nearly 15 lakh people, he added.

Modi visited the city to address the BJP rally that marks the culmination of the party’s 90-day rally across the state’s districts.

The “Nava Karnataka Nirmana Parivartana Yatra”, which traversed all the 224 assembly constituencies, was flagged off from here on November 2 last year by the party’s national president Amit Shah.

Over 100,000 people attended the rally.

Ship with 22 Indian sailors on board missing off W Africa

Agencies
New Delhi

A tanker with 22 Indian crew members on board has gone missing off West Africa, officials said yesterday, in waters plagued by piracy.

The Panama-registered MT Marine Express, loaded with 13,500 tonnes of petrol, had been anchored off the Benin city of Cotonou before authorities lost contact with the vessel on Thursday.

All efforts are being made to trace the ship, External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said.

“Merchant Ship Marine Express with 22 Indian nationals is missing off the Coast of Benin in the Gulf of Guinea. We are making all out efforts in co-ordination with Nigerian and Benin naval authorities to trace the missing ship,” Swaraj said in a tweet.

The minister also shared the number of a 24 hours helpline which can be used to inquire

about the missing people – +234-9070343860.

“Our mission in Abuja (Nigeria) is in touch with the authorities in Benin and Nigeria for their help in locating the ship and is constantly monitoring the situation,” foreign ministry spokesman Raveesh Kumar said earlier.

The Hong Kong-based Anglo-Eastern shipping company, which manages the tanker, said the last contact with the crew was made on Thursday.

“Authorities have been alerted and are responding. Our top priority is the safety of the crew, whose families have been contacted,” it said on Twitter.

The petrol was worth \$8.1mn, the Indian Express newspaper reported.

The report said there was a high possibility that the ship could have been hijacked by pirates citing sources in India’s shipping directorate.

On Friday, the company tweeted: “We regret that contact has been lost with the AE-man-

aged MT Marine Express while at Cotonou, Benin. Last contact was at 03:30 UTC, Feb 1. Authorities have been alerted and are responding. Our top priority is the safety of the crew, whose families have been contacted.”

According to officials, the crew hailed from different parts of India.

One of the sailors is Sree Unni, 25, son of Perilavallap Ashokan of Udma in Kasargod district in Kerala.

Another crew member, also from Kerala.

Local media reports said it was the second ship to go missing from the area in the last month.

In January, MT Barret went missing but the crew, most of them Indians, were released six days later after reportedly paying a ransom, the Hindustan Times said.

Several ships have been targeted by pirates in the Gulf of Guinea, seriously disrupting the international shipping route and costing the global economy billions of dollars.

Style statement



Bollywood actor Kartik Aaryan (left) showcases a creation by designer Amit Wadhwa at the Lakmé Fashion Week (LFW) Summer Resort 2018 in Mumbai yesterday.

UDF trying to get Mani back into fold

IANSS
Thiruvananthapuram

The Congress-led United Democratic Front is trying to get the Kerala Congress-Mani back into the opposition combine ahead of a by-election in the state.

But it will take a few more weeks for the Kerala Congress-Mani to decide whether it wants to ally with the Congress-led opposition grouping or the ruling Left Democratic Front (LDF) or stay alone.

Congress sources said former chief minister Oommen Chandy during his recent trip to Delhi spoke with Congress president Rahul Gandhi about the possibility of the K M Mani-led organisation to ally with the UDF.

UDF chairman and leader of opposition Ramesh Chennithala said the grouping always had a consistent stand that Mani, “our natural ally”, should return.

“He has been with us for close to four decades. Moreover in Delhi, his party is with

(the UPA). Misunderstandings can easily be talked about and settled. All of us are confident that Mani will take the right decision and he will be given an honourable entry into the UDF,” said Chennithala.

Mani had parted ways with the UDF in Kerala in August 2016. The party has six MLAs in the Kerala Assembly, one member each in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha and is a constituent of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance at the national level.

Talk of Mani’s return to the UDF comes as a by-election is to be held in Kerala’s Chengannur assembly constituency which fell vacant due to the sudden demise of a CPM legislator.

This constituency has for ages been a strong bastion of the Congress but lost it in the 2016 assembly polls to the CPM.

Speaking to IANS Mani’s son Jose K Mani, an MP, said it was too soon to decide about his party’s future alliance because it is busy in conducting internal elections.

Tamil Nadu
Roundup
By Umaima Shafiq

Tamil font
code creator
dead aged 42

Gopikrishnan, alias Thagadoor Gopi, the man who created a universal code or Unicode so that English could be transliterated to Tamil and other Indian language fonts, died of cardiac arrest in Hyderabad last week.

He was 42 and is survived by wife and two children.

Gopikrishnan was born in Dharmapuri, about 300km from Chennai to parents who were in government service.

He qualified as a software engineer and took to coding in 2004. His Unicode uploaded on his website HiGopi.com was available free to all mobile and computer users. The character of each word was designed and coded by Gopi and his assistant Surada Yarlavaanan for Tamil, Bengali, Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada, Hindi, Punjabi and Oriya.

He was employed in Hyderabad but also worked abroad on deputations for coding.

Girl injured as
man falls on her
from balcony

A four-year-old girl was critically injured when a man in drunken stupor fell over her from his balcony in the slum area of Thoraipakkam in Chennai last week.

The accident happened as Dhanyasri was walking with her grandfather.

The man who fell on her suffered only a mild fracture.

In another incident, a 32-year-old engineer died after falling from a flyover at the Chennai airport. He was identified as Chaitanya Vyuru from Vijayawada working in Bengaluru. Police suspect he was on a drug overdose.

In a third incident, a school boy died when a gas cylinder brought in to fill helium balloons at a school sports day exploded in Vellore. Jeethush, 17, died while his friend Naveen was critically injured.

Madurai man
tops in NEET
PG exam

R Madhan, a doctor from Government Madurai Medical College, scored the highest marks in Tamil Nadu getting 925/1,200 in the January 8 National Entrance Eligibility Test (NEET-PG), an admission exam for postgraduate medical studies, last week.

The second and third ranks were secured by Chirag Mandal from Christian College Vellore and P Christy from Madras Medical College.

The date for single window counselling to allot colleges will be announced soon.

Many states had opposed the NEET exams over tough syllabus and language barriers. The federal government gave in by scaling it down to Central Board of Certificate Education (CBSE) syllabus. NEET is conducted twice a year. The next exam is on May 6.

Shops destroyed
in fire at temple

A fire which broke out at the 14th century Sri Meenaksh Sundareswar temple in Madurai damaged around 30 shops in the complex last week. It took four fire tenders about an hour to control the blaze which police suspect was caused by an electrical short circuit. There were no reports of deaths or injuries as the incident occurred at night.

Meenakshi temple in the heart of Madurai has four carved gateways and is built in co-centric squares containing shops, museums and prayer halls, ponds and sanctum sanctorum. It is a major tourist attraction besides being a holy Hindu destination attracting about 100,000 visitors every day.

The temple is surrounded by traditional markets and commercial business establishments.

History being reinvented under BJP: Tharoor

By Ashraf Padanna
Thiruvananthapuram

Celebrated painter M F Hussain, who died in self-imposed in London aged 95 seven years ago, had refused to accept a Kerala award in 2009 for fear of attack from Hindu militants, Congress MP Shashi Tharoor said here.

Tharoor, who collaborated with Hussain for his 2002 illustrated work Kerala: God's Own Country, said he tried to per-

suade him to come and accept the award but failed.

"I went to him and said the Kerala government is offering security from the moment you land to the moment you leave the country," Tharoor told journalist and author Mihir Bose during a discussion on his new book *Why I am a Hindu*.

"He said he loves to do it but what would you do if these people go to a court and get an order to arrest me, and I would land in jail?"

Later delivering a talk at the

Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters on "how history is being rewritten and reinvented" under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Tharoor launched a scathing attack on Hindutva forces.

"Hinduism is a religion of acceptance, not bigotry, not a religion of destruction and violence," he said, referring to numerous vigilante attacks on Muslims in the name of Hindutva ideology.

Rejecting the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's accusation of mi-

nority appeasement against the Congress, Tharoor wondered why the socioeconomic status of Muslims was still so pathetic.

The former UN under-secretary general said his latest book was an attempt at "taking back Hinduism from those who have distorted it" in sync with the ideology of the Congress Party.

"My book is the first salvo which will certainly get stronger when it gets translated into Indian languages, as it will be," he said.

"Already, a Hindi translation

is being worked on, besides Malayalam and Telugu. There'll be a way of reaching out to ordinary people."

Rejecting the criticism of the Communist parties of Kerala that the Congress was practising a "soft Hindutva" to appease the majority community, he said the "atheist" parties had to make that compromise in West Bengal and Kerala long back.

"It's impossible to escape religion in India because it has deeply permeated the public consciousness. We need not be

godless to be secular in India. The state will not consider it as an advantage or disability," he said.

He said the Congress did not want to abdicate the space to the BJP claiming to be the only "good Hindus," and ask Hindu people to vote for it.

"There's a better way, more inclusive way and now we can talk economy, development," he said.

"Going to temple, as Rahul Gandhi did during the Gujarat elections, is a way of neutralising this Hindu narrative."

Book fair attracts thousands



Visitors through the 42nd International Kolkata Book Fair in Kolkata yesterday. It is the largest attended book fair in the world with an average record footfall of 2.5mn year on year. Every year there is a focal theme country, which gets an entire pavilion to showcase its culture, traditions, food, tourism and literature through books. This year the focal theme country is France. The event which started on January 30 runs until February 10.

Bangladesh helped curb
terror in northeast: Rajnath

IAN S
Agartala

Terror activities in northeast India have been checked due to Bangladesh's great help and support while rail links and bus services between the two countries facilitated travel of the region's people to other parts of India any much trouble, Home Minister Rajnath Singh said here yesterday.

"Bangladesh's immense help and support facilitated India to tame the terrorist activities in northeastern states. Our relation with Bangladesh is now at best place," Singh said while addressing election rallies here.

He said the central government's establishment of new rail links with Bangladesh and introduction of bus services through that country facilitated the people of northeastern states to go to other parts of India avoiding the mountainous terrain of the region and saving them huge time, costs and problems.

Reiterating that the government was very sensitive towards

the development of northeast India, Singh said that to further develop the transportation between India and other parts of the world, New Delhi and Dhaka had signed a trans-Asia rail agreement.

"Various international agencies after conducting surveys confirmed that the BJP is the only party in India which boosts country's development in real terms. India is now the fastest growing country in the world."

Due to the good governance of the Modi government, India got the best place in various international forums and platforms, he said.

Coming down heavily on the Left Front government's "non-performance", the Bharatiya Janata Party leader said the Tripura government is now providing salaries and allowances to government employees at par with the recommendations of the 4th Pay Commission and promised that if his party wins, these would be raised at par with what the 7th Pay Commission has recommended.

"National conviction rate of

various crimes is 47% and in Tripura this is only 22%. Women are not at all secure in Left-ruled Tripura," he said adding that the federal government has given Rs250bn to Tripura during the past few years but Rs24bn has remained unspent and the Left Front government is alleging that the Centre is depriving it of funds.

"While the national per capita income is Rs1.13 lakh, Tripura's per capita income is Rs78,000. Even after 25-years uninterrupted rule of the Left government, 66% people remained below poverty line with no ability to purchase even a bicycle," he added.

Information and Broadcasting and Textile Minister Smriti Irani also addressed election rallies in Kailashahar in northern Tripura, where she hit out at the Left Front government for its "failure and mis-governance, growing crime against women and unemployment".

Polling for the 60-seat Tripura assembly will be held on February 18 and counting of votes will take place on March 3.

Agencies
Amaravati, Andhra Pradesh

The Telugu Desam Party, upset over "injustice" to Andhra Pradesh in the union budget 2018-19, yesterday said it would raise the issue in parliament.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP president N Chandrababu Naidu asked his party MPs to pressurise the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government to undo the injustice.

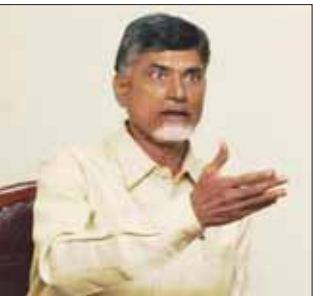
At a parliamentary board meeting of the TDP, a key ally of the BJP, Naidu said the party would begin its fight by raising the issue in parliament, sources said. He made it clear that this was only the first step.

The TDP chief said the party's next course of action would depend on the response of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government.

The board discussed in detail the budget and the central government's failure to address the issues of the state.

Some TDP leaders suggested the TDP two central ministers should quit to put pressure on the BJP. Naidu, however, said the party should first raise the issue in parliament.

TDP leader and federal Minister of State for Science and Technology Y Sujana Chowdhary



Naidu: upset

told reporters that for the party the state's interests were more important than the alliance with the BJP.

He said the MPs would try to put pressure on the central government to honour all commitments made to the state at the time of its bifurcation from Andhra Pradesh in 2014.

Chowdhary said that the budget has let down the people of Andhra Pradesh.

Stating that there will be no compromise on the state's interests, he said the future course of action would be decided by Naidu.

The TDP leader said the government should immediately address the key issues including the release of funds under the special assistance measure announced last year, funds for the Polavaram project, assistance to build the new state capital Amaravati and setting up of a railway zone in Visakhapatnam.

Naidu had met Modi with a list of demands ahead of parliament's budget session.

The TDP chief has been demanding that New Delhi help it out till the state overcame its revenue deficit and developed at par with the other neighbouring states.

"The budget allocations are very dissatisfactory and it is for the BJP to explain how it will address this. In the meantime, we will take the message to the people as to how Andhra Pradesh was completely ignored in the budget," *The Times of India* quoted Naidu as saying.

There is a "strong mood" among TDP leaders to break away from the alliance with the BJP, the Press Trust of India quoted sources as saying.

"Bengaluru, Mumbai and Ahmedabad got a substantial allocation for various projects but none of our projects, including the Vijayawada and Visakhapatnam Metro rail, got anything," a source quoted Naidu as saying.

"At the time of the state bifurcation, I was the only one who demanded equal treatment to both states. Though gross injustice was done to Andhra on account of bifurcation, I aligned with the BJP only because having good relations with the Centre could undo the injustice," Naidu told the TDP leaders.



Home Minister Rajnath Singh speaks at an election rally in Agartala yesterday.

TRAFFICKING

US-bound migrants freed in Mexico ‘lacked food, water’

Mexico has taken into custody more than 300 Central American men, women and children who were being smuggled to the US without water or food, officials said. The largest group - of 198 people crammed into the bottom of a truck - was found in Tamaulipas in the northeast, just below the US state of Texas, Mexican immigration enforcement officials said. The migrants from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador “were travelling in grossly overcrowded conditions without enough ventilation, food or water,” they said in a statement. Among the many child migrants, 55 were with their parents or relatives, while 24 were making the dangerous journey alone.

LEGAL

Court suspends export of live animals for slaughter

A Brazilian judge has suspended export of live animals for slaughter, citing concerns that they are transported in cruel conditions. Exports can only restart when guarantees of adequate treatment are provided, judge Djalma Moreira Gomes in Sao Paulo wrote in his decision, published in the local media. The injunction was in response to a case brought by an animal rights group, National Forum for the Defence and Protection of Animals. The forum’s civil suit cited conditions aboard the ship “Nada,” currently docked in Sao Paulo’s Porto de Santos with about 27,000 heads of cattle owned by Minerva Foods and bound for Turkey.

ANGER

Rio de Janeiro street party targets mayor

Rio de Janeiro’s mayor came in for some colourful criticism at the biggest of scores of pre-carnival street parties that took over the city. More than 100 parties, known as “blocos,” were held over the weekend, a week ahead of the sumptuous Sambodromo parades. One person not getting any sympathy at the parties was mayor Marcelo Crivella, whom carnival-goers accuse of giving the annual extravaganza a cold shoulder. The mayor, an important figure in Brazil’s growing evangelical Christian movement, has cut city funding for the carnival. Although he cites budget problems, critics say he is intolerant of the raucous partying.

LAW AND ORDER

Colombia arrests Brazilian following plane hijack

Colombian police have arrested a Brazilian citizen suspected of involvement in the hijacking of a light aircraft carrying 2bn pesos (about \$700,000), local media reported. Four gunmen hijacked the plane, which was transporting funds acquired from road tolls, after it landed in Aguachica in the north-east. They disarmed the plane’s security guard, forced the crew out and flew away. The aircraft was later found 16kms from the airport. The daily *El Tiempo* reported that a Brazilian national was arrested and police recovered some of the money. The gunmen had a flag with the logo of the leftist guerrilla group National Liberation Army (ELN), but they were not thought to have links with it.

TERRORISM

Qaeda seeks ransom for Colombian nun: minister

An Al Qaeda cell holding a Colombian nun in Mali is demanding a ransom, Colombian Foreign Minister Maria Angela Holguin was quoted as saying. Gloria Cecilia Narvaez was kidnapped nearly a year ago in southern Mali. Paying kidnappers “is a very complex subject that most countries do not accept,” Caracol Radio was quoted Holguin as saying. Bogota has been in touch with the Malian government and Colombian defence ministry officials have visited the country several times in an attempt to obtain Narvaez’ release, according to the minister. The 56-year-old Franciscan sister appeared in a video posted online on Monday, asking Pope Francis to intervene for her.

Ex-prisoner condemns US plan to foster Internet in Cuba

Reuters
Havana

When Alan Gross heard the Trump administration’s renewed US push to expand Internet in Cuba, disbelief washed over the American who spent five years in a Cuban jail for trying to establish clandestine communication service on the Communist-run island.

“My first response was ‘Are you kidding me?’” Gross said in a telephone interview with Reuters.

Gross worked in Cuba in 2009 for a US-government funded programme to promote political change by increasing Internet access in a country that has one of the lowest web penetration rates in the world.

In January, the US state department said it was convening a Cuba Internet Task Force to examine ways of expanding information access and independent media in Cuba.

Havana protested the move that it said attempted to violate its sovereignty, highlighting the military connotation of the expression “task force.”

Cuba views such programmes as part of longstanding US attempts to topple its government.

In 2009, Cuba arrested and later sentenced Gross to 15 years in jail, a move that put on hold a warming in US-Cuban relations under former US president Barack Obama, a Democrat.

It was only with his early release in 2014 that Obama and Cuban leader Raul Castro could announce a long-negotiated detente, hoping to end five decades of hostility.

That was before Republican Donald Trump became president, vowing to roll back on the normalisation of relations.

“We are supposed to learn from our mistakes,” said Gross. “I learned the hard way that it’s illegal to distribute anything in Cuba that’s funded in full or part by the US government,” said the

68-year-old, who lost five teeth in jail and around 115 pounds (52kgs).

“Until the government of Cuba wants the kind of assistance US is capable of providing, the US shouldn’t be doing stuff there,” said Gross.

Cuban state-run media has written extensively this week about past US attempts to manipulate telecommunications for political ends.

Washington, for example, set up a social media network for Cubans called ZunZuneo even after Gross had been jailed. It ran from 2010 to 2012.

In the case of Gross, he imported banned satellite communications devices and other high-tech gear in his luggage and helped install it at Jewish centres in Havana, Santiago and Camaguey during five trips to Cuba in 2009.

Gross noted Cuba had vastly expanded Internet access of its own volition during his time in jail. The US government should discuss the issue of Internet directly with Cuba, providing details for example of how it could boost economic growth, he said. “There are so many things that could be happening in a positive and constructive way,” he said.

Since Obama’s detente for example, various US telecoms companies have reached deals with Cuba to provide roaming to their customers on the island. Asked if it had invited Cuban officials to the first public meeting on February 7 of the task force, the US state department said it was “open to the public as space allows.”

“Federal advisory committees, such as this task force, provide objective advice in a transparent manner from a variety of perspectives, and are accessible to the public,” it said.

Gross said he would return on vacation to Cuba “in a heart-beat” if Cuban officials let him, to meet up with the families of his former fellow inmates and explore the country.

Tillerson in Argentina



US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson speaks next to Argentina’s Foreign Minister Jorge Faurie at a press conference at San Martin Palace, state department headquarters, in Buenos Aires yesterday. On the fourth day of a five-nation tour of Latin America and Jamaica, Tillerson is on his first tour to the continent as he seeks to better define US strategy in its own hemisphere.

Venezuela likely to set election date today

AFP
Caracas

Venezuela’s unpopular President Nicolas Maduro has urged officials to set a presidential election date by today for a vote that he’d like to see take place within another week.

“I am urging the Constituent Assembly (a super-legislature stacked with Maduro loyalists) and the Elections Board to set a date hopefully by Monday for the elections,” he told supporters after the small Marxist-Leninist Tupamaro Party

endorsed him for re-election in the crisis-hit South American country.

The snap poll is to happen sometime before the end of April, after the Constituent Assembly announced last week the vote was being brought forward from December.

The Supreme Court, which critics say systematically bows to Maduro, has barred the opposition coalition from fielding a candidate under its banner, and banned several prominent opposition figures from participating.

The opposition says the moves are designed to engineer

a second term for Maduro.

The ruling Socialist Party, which Maduro leads, on Friday officially voted to make the president its candidate for the election.

“I am urging the Constituent Assembly and the Elections Board to set a date hopefully by Monday for the elections”

The poll date has been a controversial issue in the dialogue between government and opposition forces being held in the Dominican Republic since December 1.

They may continue to meet today, the host, Dominican President Danilo Medina, has said.

The election will be held against a backdrop of financial and political crisis.

The country, impoverished despite being a major oil producer, is suffering food and medicine shortages brought on by a recent period of low oil prices, declining production, and economic mismanagement.

It is in the grips of hyperinflation and teetering on the brink of outright default.

Venezuela is also increasingly isolated internationally.

The US and European Union have imposed sanctions on Maduro and his officials, with Washington calling him a “dictator.”

US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson is on a tour of South America, during which he is raising Venezuela’s crisis with governments in the region.

Maduro and his government defend themselves by saying the economic crisis is the work of enemy nations – invariably the US, sometimes Colombia – in cahoots with right-wing businessmen seeking to bring him down.

Victims’ families ask court to annul Fujimori pardon

Reuters
San Jose

The families of victims of human rights abuses under former Peruvian president Alberto Fujimori testified at an international human rights tribunal, asking the court to annul the controversial pardon of the former leader late last year.

Fujimori, who served as president during the 1990s, was less than halfway into a 25-year prison term stemming from convictions on human rights abuses when current President Pedro Pablo Kuczynski issued the pardon to the ailing 79-year-old.

While groups such as Amnesty International harshly criticised the pardon, about 65% of Peruvians support it, according to a recent poll.

The pardon was issued on Christmas Eve, and met by thousands of enraged protesters who took to the streets to criticise what many viewed as a miscarriage of justice.

Shortly after he announced his decision, Kuczynski, who was also facing his own possible removal from office by Peru’s Congress, described it as a “humanitarian pardon.”

Critics who accompanied victims’ families before the Costa Rica-based Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR) described it very differently.

“The pardon was contrary to law and a measure of impunity that must be revoked,” said Viviana Krsticevic, head of the Centre for Justice and International Law (CEJIL).

Krsticevic argued that Kuczynski’s reasoning behind the pardon, details of which were publicly revealed for the first time on Friday, was full of inconsistencies and contradictions.

Lawyers representing the Peruvian government denied the pardon was the result of a political pact between Kuczynski and the Fujimori family, which continues to maintain considerable political influence in the Congress.

“Speculation should be kept

outside the court,” said lawyer Adrian Simons.

In late January, Reuters reported that three months before he granted Fujimori the pardon, Kuczynski met the former leader’s son, lawmaker Kenji Fujimori, to discuss his release.

At the meeting, Kenji Fujimori offered Kuczynski political support in Congress in return for the pardon.

Simons added that any disagreement over the pardon should be resolved by Peru’s justice system and he alleged that the IACHR was being used as a “shortcut.”

If the court’s resolution, expected in the next few weeks, revokes the pardon, Peru’s government is obligated to accept it.

“We hope Fujimori goes back to prison to serve his sentence,” said Carmen Amaro, sister of Armando Amaro, who was killed in a 1992 massacre during Fujimori’s rule that was cited in his conviction.

“This isn’t hatred or revenge,” she said. “It’s justice.”



Costa Rican presidential candidate of the opposition National Liberation Party (PLN), Antonio Alvarez Desanti, and one the favourites for the national elections, casts his ballot at a polling station in San Jose yesterday.

Costa Rica goes to polls to choose president

AFP
San Jose

Costa Rica yesterday voted in the first round of the central American country’s presidential election.

A total 13 candidates are vying to succeed outgoing President Luis Guillermo Solis, who is constitutionally barred from seeking a second consecutive term.

If no candidate wins 40% of the vote, a second round, runoff election will be held on April 1.

An evangelical politician, Fabricio Alvarado, has leapt from obscurity to be the front-runner with around 17% support, according to surveys.

“This is the first time I’m voting. I’m a bit nervous,” said Nelia Araya, a 20-year-old student casting her ballot at a school in the capital San Jose.

She said she was worried about one of the candidate’s “homophobic discourse” and had urged her family to vote “so that someone who wants

to take rights away from people doesn’t win.”

Polling in the country took place under a bright blue sky and tropical sunshine.

Overseas ballots from Costa Rican consulates abroad had been filing in since Saturday, with the biggest number of emigrant voters found in the US.

Solis said as he voted in San Jose to choose his successor that he saw the biggest problem facing Costa Rica to be “the fiscal deficit and its combination with the debt.”

Accompanied by relatives and advisers, the outgoing leader called on voters, who were also choosing a new legislative assembly, to “elect a government better than mine, a president better than me.”

A country with a costly health and pension system, Costa Rica has seen its deficit inch up to stand at 6.2% of gross domestic product.

Public debt is 65% of GDP, creating concerns among officials that much-vaunted economic stability could be threatened.



‘Doctrine of necessity’ buried: chief justice

Internews
Islamabad

In what appears to be a response to the bitter denunciation of military takeovers and the judiciary's role in them by ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif a day earlier, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Mian Saqib Nisar yesterday said that the infamous ‘doctrine of necessity’ that had given judicial nod to successive martial laws in the country now lay buried.

The critics should read the July 2009 judgement of a Supreme Court bench, headed by the then CJP Iftikhar Chaudhry, in the Sindh High Court Bar Association case that not only declared the steps taken by ex-military ruler retired General Pervez Musharraf illegal but also

paved the way for a high treason case against him for imposing a state of emergency on November 3, 2007, said Chief Justice Nisar at a meeting of judges belonging to special tribunals and administrative courts at the National Judicial Policy-making Tribunal.

Rejecting the criticism about not having taken military dictators to task, the CJ said that unlike the past the courts were independent and not part of any campaign though he conceded that the judiciary might have passed some erroneous verdicts in the past.

He declared the judiciary would not let anyone derail the democratic system and in any such case, he would quit.

The judiciary has repeatedly come under criticism by Sharif and leaders of the ruling Pakistan Muslim League-

Nawaz since July 28, 2017 when the apex court disqualified him from holding the office of prime minister.

In his latest speech at the seminar on “Future of democracy in Pakistan”, the PML-N president said the judiciary had adopted a strict attitude, which was often “against the norms of justice”, about politicians and elected representatives compared to dictators who were always “dear to them”.

He also criticised the judiciary for introducing the “doctrine of necessity” to facilitate the military dictators.

Justifying actions of taking “excessive” suo motu notices, as he reportedly took up over a dozen such cases in the past couple of weeks, Chief Justice Nisar said it was the responsibility of the superior courts to protect

fundamental rights of citizens. “Sometimes the situation demands taking up suo motu notices in the public interest,” he added.

The judiciary was an important pillar of the state and the state would be at loss if this pillar was not able to work, he said.

The chief justice said that special courts and tribunals were part and parcel of adjudicator and asked the special courts to work with passion, devotion and in accordance with law.

He said the shortage of staff should not be an obstacle in administration of justice. The issue of vacant posts in special courts and tribunals had been taken up and a number of slots had been filled, he added.

He said if the presiding officers and chairmen of the tribunals faced any issue regarding

their pay, perks and privileges the same be communicated through the high courts.

Chief Justice Nisar said it was the responsibility of judges to make sure that justice prevailed.

“We are not going to wait for the laws of tomorrow. We have to make do with the laws of today to ensure that justice is being delivered,” he said.

All judges needed to follow Article 4 (right of individuals to be dealt with in accordance with law) of the constitution, the chief justice declared, adding that there should be punishment for the judges who wouldn't comply by Article 4 of the constitution.

The CJP also asked lawyers to promise that their prime agenda would be to deliver justice under the command of the law and obey it unconditionally.

Minister urges apex court to jail Musharraf

Pakistani Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal has said that he will consider the Supreme Court independent when it will send former president and military dictator retired Gen Pervez Musharraf to Adiala jail, Internews reports. Talking to reporters yesterday, he said that the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was concerned about the dignity of the judiciary. “If the Supreme Court becomes controversial, it will be a loss equal to the disqualification of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif,” the minister said. Federal Minister for Railways Saad Rafiq advanced Iqbal's argument by saying that state institutions should avoid interfering in each other's domains. While the judiciary should be respected, it should also respect other institutions, Rafiq said in his separate talk with the media. Iqbal said that if the Supreme Court wanted to maintain its honour, it should punish retired Gen Musharraf like it had punished Nehal Hashmi. “Sending contempt notices to political workers like Talal Chaudhry will not help to restore the dignity of the Supreme Court. Instead it should summon former president Musharraf

and take action against him for damaging the constitution, making the then chief justice and his children hostage and manhandling him,” he said. The minister said that the PML-N believed that the decisions against Sharif and the party leadership were not based on justice. “Similarly, people also have reservations over the decision to disqualify Sharif. If raising voice against it is contempt of court, then it should also be applied to people who have been participating in public gatherings of the PML-N, including the rally on GT Road, to express their concern over the judgement,” he said. He said that not only the PML-N but the entire world had expressed concern over the disqualification of Sharif. “We should avoid controversies and the institutions should work within their constitutional limits,” Iqbal said. He said that people would think that pre-poll rigging was being committed if the PML-N continued to be made target. “From Karachi to Gwadar no one is ready to believe that the actions being taken against the PML-N and Nawaz Sharif are based on justice,” the minister said, adding that the judiciary would become controversial by taking such decisions.

Technology helps police in tracing missing teen

Internews
Islamabad

The motorway police of Pakistan used technology to recover an 11-year old missing boy travelling in a passenger bus.

Sources said Hammad went missing from Abbottabad. He was accompanied by his neighbour named Usman, who misled him and took him along with him in a bus from Abbottabad.

With the help of CCTV, the motorway police got footage of Hammad and Usman. Deputy Superintendent of Police Asma Naqvi reportedly contacted Babar, the photographer of motorway police and asked him to check the pictures shared by her on WhatsApp and have a look at the recorded movie.

She took the passengers' details and searched out the name of Usman who was taking Hammad with him.

Finally she managed to find out that a person named Usman was travelling in a bus coming from Abbottabad. She took the contact details of the bus driver from the history sheet of the passengers and asked him to check the passengers of seat numbers 5 and 6.

The driver checked the two passengers and told DSP Naqvi the ages and dress of the two boys.

Meanwhile, the motorway police photographer Babar found the movie of the boys and provided their screen-shot for identification.

The bus was searched at the Sial More service area and the two boys were found seated on the seats number 5 and 6.

Hammad was sent back to his parents and the culprit Usman was handed over to the Abbottabad police for investigation and further action.

Pakistan gets a dash of music Diplo-macy

By Saiyna Bashir, Reuters
Islamabad

American DJ and record producer Diplo brought his Mad Decent Block Party to Pakistan's capital over the weekend, headlining a roster of musicians including local Pakistani acts.

For two-time Grammy winner Diplo, playing Pakistan is a way to foster good relations with the mostly Muslim country after an angry January 1 tweet from US President Donald Trump complaining that Pakistan gives “terrorists” a safe haven.

“I think the best way we can do any kind of diplomacy with the Pakistani people is ... basically reaching out to the kids like we do at the concerts,” Diplo told TMZ last month after the Trump tweet, which soured US-Pakistani relations.

He added that by having US acts connect with the large youth population – an estimated 60% of Pakistanis are under age 30 – “they can grow into being our allies”.

More than 2,500 young people crowded into an outdoor



DJ Khalifa of Lyari Underground, a Pakistani rap group, performs at Diplo's Mad Decent Block Party at The Rock Musicarium in Islamabad yesterday.

venue in the capital, Islamabad, to a scaled down version of the event known for bringing together some of the hottest names in dance-hall, hip hop and electronic music.

Among the headliners were

Diplo's chart-topping side project Major Lazer Soundsystem, DJ Chrome Sparks and Pakistani duo SNKM, which has played the South by Southwest festival and toured with Diplo in the US.

“There's a lot of bridges being built between here and the US,” says SNKM's Adil Omar, who also has a successful hip hop career and a new album and film Transcendence to be released this year.

Punjab village mourns death of lawmaker

Internews
Islamabad

Former PPP Sindh member of provincial assembly (MPA) Fariha Razzaq Haroon, **pictured**, who was found shot dead on Thursday at her Karachi residence along her husband Mir Bijarani, belonged to Toba Tek Singh.

She was the daughter of Abdul Razzaq, of Chak 391-JB, Kainthan. Razzaq had settled in Islamabad for business many years ago, and later moved on to Karachi with his family.

Fariha's mother late Nishat Afza had also remained a PPP lawmaker on a reserved seat from 2002 to 2007 when Pariha was also the Sindh lawmaker on PPP ticket.

The Razzaq family has also been running their FM 95 Radio in Toba Tek Singh since 2007 which broadcasts transmission from a station in family's native village Chak 391-JB, Kainthan.

The radio station is looked after by her brother Umer Razzaq while their father runs a security company in Karachi which provides security guards to dif-

ferent business companies and institutions.

After the tragic death of Fariha, FM 95 radio station closed its regular transmission.

Radio station manager Chaudhry Hamid Ali Gill said only Naats and Qur'an recitation were broadcast on Thursday and Friday. Regular transmissions were restored yesterday.

Fariha's father Abdul Raz-

zaq said by phone from Karachi that soon a date would be announced to hold Qur'an khwani and chehlum in their village.

Village head Chaudhry Mukhtar said the village people would remain grateful to Fariha's late mother Nishat Afza who had provided gas supply to her village 11 years ago with a Rs10mn grant from her MPA budget.



Commercial fishing returns to Islamabad lake

Internews
Islamabad

After nearly 14 years, commercial fishing has returned to Rawal Lake this winter. The move is not without its detractors, with environmentally conscious citizens as well as officials from the relevant agencies opposing commercial fishing on various grounds; possibly because, in some cases, illegal fishing has benefited many individuals.

In addition to containing poaching and illegal fishing, the contract for fishing in Rawal Lake also includes a clause to replenish the fish population.

“The most important segment of the contract was not payment to the



Rawal Lake in Islamabad.

national exchequer but the clause that the contractor would introduce fish seedlings too,” said Lubna Said, a sen-

ior official from the Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) administration.

Said told that the ICT was respon-

sible for stopping illegal fishing, which continues in isolated corners of the lake, while the contractor must abide by ethical modes of fishing netting to supplement the aquatic ecosystem.

The contract was awarded at Rs44 million in January 2017 for two years, and the contractor introduced around 1m fish seeds at a cost of around Rs10m in March and April.

One of the partners in the contracting firm said they have introduced six varieties in the lake that are compatible with the local environment.

“Islamabad has wide ranging temperatures, from up to 40°C in the summer to almost 0°C in peak winter, so fish that have higher survival rates in Rawal Lake are Thaila, Mori, Rahu, Mahasher, Silver and Bighead,”

M. Aurangzeb explained. Sole, he said, was already present in the lake in significant numbers.

He added that Mahasher was present in Rawal Lake in significantly high numbers in previous decades as it has a tendency to breed in such places, but excessive fishing in previous years had depleted almost all aquatic life in the lake.

The contractor will reintroduce seedlings in March and April 2018, which will then be ready for harvest in the winter. The last contract for commercial fishing was awarded in 2004 and terminated the same year, after the contractor developed differences with the ICT over continued illegal fishing.

“One such example of abusive fishing in the past decade is that visi-

tors to any corner of the lake will hardly find a turtle or tortoise there,” Aurangzeb said.

The fleet of 25 boats place their nets in the morning, and the same boats go back in the second half of the day to pick the nets for the harvest.

While most of the catch is sold the wholesalers at the Gunjmandi fish market in Rawalpindi, a portion is also bought by enthusiasts near Naval Club.

Up to 600kg of fresh fish is bought by the residents seeking quality produce at the market price.

Aurangzeb added, “There has to be a dedicated sale point in the city for residents where they can purchase the fish of their choice, as almost all stallholders claim that they do not sell farm-raised fish but those caught at Rawal Lake.”

Panel to begin probe on vaccine controversy

Manila Times
Manila

The House of Representatives will open today its inquiry on the controversial P3.5bn anti-dengue immunisation programme, which was found out later to have endangered the lives of victims who acquired the mosquito-borne disease for the first time after they were given the vaccine.

“This will be our first hearing since Sanofi released the negative findings of its long-term follow-up study which showed that children who never had dengue but who were given the shots had an increased risk of a severe case and hospitalisation from the third year after immunisation,” said Rep. Johnny Pimentel of Surigao del Sur, chairman of the Good Government and Public Accountability Committee.

Pimentel said the liability of Sanofi Pasteur, manufacturer of Dengvaxia, would not end with it paying the Department of Health (DoH) about P1.2bn worth of unused doses of the drug.

“Graft charges may be warranted against the officials involved even if they did not make any money for themselves from the transaction. Under the law, officials may be held accountable for cor-



Juliet Sio-Aguilar (right), paediatrician and head of the Philippine General Hospital (PGH) expert panel, speaks during a press conference regarding the Dengvaxia vaccine at the DoH headquarters in Manila.

rupt and unlawful acts, such as entering into highly injurious purchase contracts, without any need to establish that they profited from the transaction,” Pimentel added.

The anti-dengue campaign using Dengvaxia was implemented under the term of then president Benigno Aquino, with Janet Garin as his health secretary.

Anti-graft agency defends autopsy on alleged victims

Manila Times
Manila

Anti-crime advocates decried efforts to discredit the findings of the Public Attorney’s Office (PAO), as well as the families of the alleged victims of the government’s anti-dengue immunisation campaign who have “lost trust” in the Department of Health (DoH).

“We expect some efforts to discredit us and to discredit the victims, but we are not doing this for our own sake but for the sake of the victims who have lost trust to the Department of Health (DoH),” Dante Jimenez, chairman of the Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption, told *Manila Times* in an interview yesterday.

Jimenez also said that the autopsies performed by PAO on the bodies of the victims, mostly children, who received Dengvaxia, were on the request of their families.

The VACC chairman was responding to an appeal by a group of doctors and health advocates asking the Department of Justice (DoJ) to direct the PAO to stop performing autopsies and “leave the matter of determining the cause of death to competent forensic pathologists”.

Sen. Joseph Victor “JV” Ejercito, chairman of the Senate Committee on Health and De-

mography, in a separate interview, said he agreed with the call for PAO to stop conducting autopsies because it could add to the “hysteria and panic”.

He added that it would be better if the autopsy be conducted by the team of medical experts from the University of the Philippines-Philippine General Hospital (UP-PGH).

Meanwhile, the Senate Blue Ribbon Committee will present documents that would show Sanofi’s deficiencies that the DoH failed to report when it resumes its hearing tomorrow, Sen. Richard Gordon said.

Gordon, committee chairman, said the committee was initially looking at possible graft related cases to be recommended against former president Benigno Aquino former budget Secretary Florencio Abad and Janette Garin, who headed the DoH at that time.

He said the three were liable for graft because there was obvious haste in the procurement of the vaccines.

Gordon said the vaccine was procured and were given to more than 800,000 school children even though it has not completed the clinical trials.

“If it can be determined that that there have been deaths because of their actions, then they could also face reckless imprudence resulting in homicide,” he said.

Govt condemns killing of public works dept staffers

By Julmunir I Jannaral
Cotabato City

Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao Gov. Mujiv Hataman has condemned the killing of two field workers of the Department of Public Works and Highways in ARMM (DPWH-ARMM) while they were building infrastructure projects in the province of Basilan.

An Abu Sayyaf gunman stood in the middle of the Basilan Circumferential Road and shot a DPWH-ARMM dump truck and a transit mixer with an M203 grenade assault rifle, killing the drivers of both heavy equipment vehicles last week.

Two more DPWH ARMM personnel who were with the slain drivers are in the inten-

sive care unit, fighting for their lives. “Even as we mourn these deaths, we condemn the attack on them and the assaults on the personnel of the ARMM who have been working to ensure that government services are delivered well, so that lasting peace may become a reality here,” Hataman said.

“The perpetrators of these acts of violence hampered our efforts for the development of the region,” he added.

The Abu Sayyaf persists in attacking the ARMM government’s ongoing construction of arterial road networks in Basilan.

It has been doing this since 2012 because these roads enable law enforcement and military personnel and their vehicles easier access to Abu Sayyaf lairs on the island.

“These roads that the DP-

WH-ARMM are building are vital to connecting the communities in our region and facilitating growth and development that will offer our people better opportunities for prosperity and peace,” the ARMM regional governor said.

Don Mustapha Loong, DPWH-ARMM regional secretary, said their district engineer has been attacked twice with hand grenades, and the DPWH-ARMM itself has been subjected to numerous threats, including extortion.

“We remain firm in our determination to continue building the infrastructure our people need. Yes, we grieve, but these attacks will not deter the ARMM regional government from continuing its efforts to provide the infrastructure and vital services our people need,” Hataman said.

Duterte vows crackdown on smuggling of cars

By Ralph Villanueva
Manila Times

President Rodrigo Duterte has put his foot down on the smuggling of luxury cars and vowed to destroy them tomorrow.

At a forum on indigenous people in Davao City on Thursday night, Duterte said the smugglers should “watch their money burn” because he will arrange a tractor to run over the smuggled luxury cars.

“I will bulldoze them this Tuesday. I’ve instructed (Bureau of Customs) Commissioner Isidro Lapena to not sell them because the situation will remain the same. The smugglers will still be the only ones who will benefit from the sale and they will be the only ones



Duterte: crackdown on smuggling

who will wait for the next auctions. It is legal and it is cheap because it is auctioned,” he added.

According to Duterte, the “style” of the smugglers is to import the luxury cars and send them to a fake consignee.

“Fake news, fake name, fake address. And because no one

owns the smuggled cars, then no one is there to pay for the tax,” he said.

“So, your style is you just wait. Then after a year, six months, the ones responsible for arranging the selling of the cars will have them auctioned. And you’ll still be the only ones who will buy them because you’re the only ones who’ve been informed that there is an auction,” Duterte added.

The president said even if the smugglers kept on importing cars, he would bulldoze the vehicles every day.

“You want luxury cars? Have them imported and pay for them in advance because you like them so much. But don’t fool with us because you’ve always been, you’re fooling the government. I don’t care about what you’ll say about me. I

don’t care as long as I am doing my job,” Duterte added.

Also on Thursday, Malacanang spokesman Harry Roque said the destruction of luxury vehicles will be a stern warning to smugglers in the country.

“The government is serious in its fight to curb smuggling and corruption and hope to make the Bureau of Customs as a showcase in our good governance drive,” Roque added in a news briefing in Baguio City.

“It is common knowledge that many apprehended luxury vehicles ultimately end up in the market where they can easily win in auction,” he said.

The Customs bureau seized millions worth of used McLaren, Lamborghini and Ferrari sports cars at the Manila International Container Port last November.

Seven drug dealers arrested in Quezon

Manila Times
Manila

Seven suspected drug dealers were arrested in separate buy-bust operations over the weekend in Quezon City.

Mark Tolentino, 22, a known drug dealer in Barangay Bungad, was arrested in front of a gas station along West Avenue Drive at 5:00am yesterday, according to QCPD Director Guillermo Eleazar. Eleazar said a police undercover agent bought P11,000 worth of marijuana from Tolentino that led to his arrest after the transaction.

Confiscated from the suspect were two blocks of fresh mari-

juana leaves, drug paraphernalia, P10,000 in “fake” bills and P1,000 in genuine buy-bust money. Meanwhile, Joey Ababao, 35, was arrested on Saturday night in Barangay Kaunlaran in Cubao. Ababao, who was on the drug watch list of Police Station 7, was caught at 9:20pm. Confiscated from him were a sachet of shabu, drug paraphernalia and the buy-bust money.

Five others were arrested in a shabu session in Barangay Baesa. Operatives from Police Station 3 arrested Jerome Hasal, 27; Rolando Teraza, 34; Efren Pata-ta, 43; Sidney Hara, 43; and a 17-year old minor.

Confiscated from them was a sachet of shabu and drug paraphernalia.

AVIATION Pilots hurt after crash-landing on beach

Two foreign pilots were injured yesterday when the twin-engine aircraft they were flying crash-landed on a beach in the western Philippines, police said. Briton Max Edward Harvey, 28, and Malaysian Harinalan Muniandy, 23, were rushed to hospital for treatment of various injuries, said Chief Inspector Imelda Tolentino, a regional police spokeswoman.

The plane, a Piper Aztec 2350, crash-landed on the beach of the village of New Agutaya, 487 kilometres south-west of Manila, Tolentino said.

“The aircraft was bound for Manila and loaded with live fish when it crashed due to engine failure,” she said, adding that aviation authorities were inspecting the plane.

Mayon evacuees assured of quality goods

Manila Times
Manila

The Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) assured victims of the Mayon volcano disaster that relief goods being given to them were of the highest quality and said that anything less would be acted on immediately.

“I assure you that relief goods that are being distributed are not expired because that is unacceptable. Goods that will be found expired will be investigated,” said DSWD Officer-in-Charge Emmanuel Leyco in the wake of an investigation by the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office.

According to the report of DSWD Field Office 5, the relief goods will not expire until 2020.

Leyco further clarified that the agency distributed food items three months before the expiration date.

Leyco flew to Albay last week to assess the status of the distribution of the relief goods and the conditions in the evacuation centres.

He emphasised that the agency distributed relief goods through its Food for Work Programme wherein family food packs were provided in exchange for the work carried out by beneficiaries.

As of yesterday, 19,113 families or 72,441 persons are currently staying in 88 evacuation centres in Albay, the DSWD said.

Meanwhile, Mayon emitted a weaker lava fountain and a 500-metre ash plume that lasted for 37 seconds on Saturday evening.

The Philippine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology (Phivolcs) said that while Mayon’s activity has been waning, Alert Level 4 remained in effect over the area.

“Phivolcs will maintain close monitoring of Mayon volcano and any new development will be communicated to all concerned stakeholders,” the agency said.



A resident distributes free masks to motorists as Mayon volcano spews ashes in Camlaig town, Albay province.

Maldives top court seeks to impeach president: AG

Reuters
Male

The Supreme Court in the Maldives is trying to impeach President Abdulla Yameen for not obeying its order to release jailed opposition leaders, the attorney general (AG) said yesterday, warning of further instability in the Indian Ocean nation.

The Maldives, best known for its luxury resorts, has been in a political crisis since the top court threw out terrorism convictions last week against former president Mohamed Nasheed and others who have been trying to oust the president for years.

Yameen has faced calls at home, and from the United States and India, among other nations, to heed the court decision on Nasheed, the island's first democratically elected president, and the others, but so far has dug in his heels.

Home to about 400,000

people, the Maldives has also been drawn into a regionwide tussle for influence between India – with which it has long-standing political and security ties – and China, which opened an embassy in 2011 and has offered technical and financial assistance to build infrastructure.

Attorney General Mohamed Anil said the government had received information the Supreme Court was preparing to fire Yameen, but such a move would be illegal and resisted by government law enforcement authorities.

“We have received information that things might happen that will lead to a national security crisis,” Anil told reporters in the capital, Male.

“The information says the Supreme Court might issue a ruling to impeach or remove the president from power,” he said, adding that government bodies had been given instructions not to carry out such an order.

Meanwhile, Parliament Sec-



In this file photo, Abdulla Yameen takes oath as the president of Maldives during a swearing-in ceremony at the parliament in Male in 2013.

retary General Ahmed Mohamed, who is politically neutral, suddenly resigned yesterday, citing personal reasons a day before the opening session of the body.

Mohamed had told Reuters he would abide by a separate Su-

preme Court ruling ordering the reinstatement of 12 legislators who defected from Yameen's ruling party last year. Allowing them to return to the legislature would deprive him of a majority.

More than 100 riot police stood guard outside government offices in Male, including parliament, as well as at Republic Square, a site of protests by opposition activists, although the streets were quiet.

The combined opposition said it feared a military takeover of the islands to preserve Yameen's grip on power.

“The intimidation of the Supreme Court justices, with the highly irregular statement made by the attorney general defying the Supreme Court, supported by the two chiefs of the security forces, is tantamount to the effective sidelining of the judiciary and in direct contravention of the constitution,” it said in a statement.

“Maldivians are fearful that President Yameen is about to order a full military takeover of

the country, in an attempt to ensure he is not removed from office.”

The crisis poses the biggest threat to Yameen's control of the Maldives since he took power in 2013, defeating Nasheed in an election which the latter's supporters said was rigged.

Yameen has stopped short of saying he will not obey the court order. He told a party meeting on Saturday he “did not expect the Supreme Court ruling at all”.

Critics of the government continued to face pressure. Yesterday, police raided the home of Hassan Saeed, the head of the judicial administration department, which the opposition said was considering a corruption investigation into Yameen.

Police said in a statement they were looking to arrest Saeed over an investigation into apartment purchases.

They were also inquiring about whether family members of Supreme Court Chief Justice Abdulla Saeed and Supreme Court Justice Ali Hameed, who

handed down last week's ruling, were involved in the apartment purchases, police said.

Yameen's senior ruling party members also called on authorities to shut down independent TV channel Raajje TV saying it was spreading discord.

In response, the US embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka, issued a tweet to say it was “dismayed to hear rumours” about a potential shutdown, and calling it “yet another blow” to freedom of the press.

The political drama in the Maldives, which is made up of 26 coral atolls and 1,192 individual islands, centres on tiny, densely populated Male, the base of all its major institutions.

Besides political wrangling, the largely Muslim island chain is grappling with problems such as significant numbers of radicalised youth who enlisted to fight for the Islamic State militant group in the Middle East.

Yameen on Saturday fired his second police chief in three days.

Two held over alleged bond scam

Reuters
Colombo

Sri Lankan police said yesterday they had arrested two officials from primary dealer Perpetual Treasuries Ltd, which was named in a report as being involved in an alleged government bond scam in 2015.

Police arrested Arjun Aloysius, owner of Perpetual Treasuries to which more than half the bonds in a 2015 auction were sold to, and Perpetual chief executive officer Kasun Palisena. Aloysius is the son-in-law of Arjuna Mahendran, who was central bank governor at the time of the auction in question.

The arrests came a month after President Maithripala Sirisena said a panel had recommended legal action against the finance minister and central bank governor of the time, and the owner and officials of Perpetual Treasuries.

Sirisena said the presidential commission of inquiry had concluded that Perpetual Treasuries had profited through illegal means.

Mahendran, Aloysius, and Perpetual Treasuries have denied any wrongdoing.

Police spokesman Ruwan Gunasekara said they had arrested Aloysius and Palisena yesterday “as part of ongoing investigations on the bond issue”.

“The CID has reported the facts to the magistrate court and made the arrest. The two will be produced before the magistrate.”

On I-Day, Lanka vows to achieve economic freedom

IRANS
Colombo

Sri Lanka celebrated the 70th anniversary of its Independence yesterday with grand military parades and attendance of political leaders.

Sri Lanka forces held a colourful grand parade along the Galle Road, close to the Colombo Harbour to celebrate the 70th anniversary of independence from British colonial rule in 1948, Xinhua reported.

In his speech, President Maithripala Sirisena said Sri Lanka would gain complete independence only after achieving complete economic and cultural freedom.

The year 2018 will be a crucial year for Sri Lanka in achieving economic freedom, and the government must ensure the country achieves its long term goals, said the president.

“We must remember that true freedom does not comprise only of political freedom. As a country, our future successes lie in our commitment to achiev-



Sri Lanka's President Maithripala Sirisena addressing the nation during the country's 70th Independence day celebrations in Colombo yesterday.

ing long term goals with firm determination, as we have done in the past,” Sirisena said.

He paid tribute to the patriots who had sacrificed their lives in

achieving the country's freedom over the years.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe said that since being elected to power, the government

had been consistently focusing on creating the right social and political climate needed to build a society that is indeed free and stable.

Nepal provinces hold assembly meetings

Agencies
Kathmandu

In a significant step towards institutionalising federal democratic system in Nepal, four provincial assemblies yesterday started their maiden meetings.

The first-ever meetings of state assemblies in Province 2, 5, 6 and 7 were held in the respective provincial capitals.

The meetings were convened at the temporary headquarters Janakpur, Butwal, Birendranagar and Dhangadi, respectively.

Janakpur, the temporary capital of Province 2, has seen a spike in political activities in the past few days.

Top leaders of the Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum Nepal and the Rastriya Janata Party Nepal, which gained significance with their movement for federalism and the rights of the Madhesi people, are now in Janakpur.

They are holding consultations for electing officials to hold provincial posts.

There have been a series of protests and movements in

the Tarai, mostly in Province 2, over some provisions of the federal constitution adopted in 2015. More than 120 Madhesi were killed in clashes with the security forces.

First time in the history of Nepal elections for provincial assemblies were held in two phases on November 26 and December 7 last year.

A total of 550 members were elected for seven provincial assemblies. The Left Alliance of CPN (UML) and CPN (Maoist Center) registered massive victory in all states except Province 2.

Two Madhesi parties Sanghiya Samajbadi Forum Nepal and Rashtriya Janata Party Nepal jointly secured majority in Province 2.

Meanwhile, negotiations for formation of central as well as provincial governments are on.

At the central level, CPN-UML and Maoist Centre, which have formed Left Alliance, are all set to form a majority government.

Out of seven provinces, the Left Alliance is in a position to form governments in all except Province No 2.

Bangladesh foreign exchange reserves fall in January

Bangladesh's foreign exchange reserves fell to \$32.69bn as at the end of January from \$33.23bn the previous month, but were up nearly 3% from a year earlier, the central bank said yesterday.

The monthly decline was fuelled by a rise in imports, a senior central bank official said, adding the reserves were sufficient to cover about 10 months' worth of imports for the country of 160mn people.

Steady garment exports and remittances from Bangladeshis working overseas, the key drivers of the country's more than \$250bn economy, have helped foreign exchange reserves grow steadily in recent years.

Last month, Bangladesh's central bank kept its key policy interest rates unchanged, while it raised its private sector credit growth target in a bid to achieve an economic growth target of 7.4% for the 2017-18 financial year that ends in June.

Bangladesh's economic growth hit a record 7.28% in the 2016-17 financial year, up from 7.11% the previous year.

Farmer loses legs as mine explodes

AFP
Dhaka

A Bangladeshi farmer lost both legs when he stepped on a landmine reportedly planted by Myanmar security forces in a buffer zone between the two countries, officials said yesterday.

The incident happened near the southern Bangladesh border town of Naikhongchari on Saturday when Badiur Rahman crossed into the zone.

“His cow strayed inside the Myanmar border in no-man's land. He accidentally stepped on a mine when he went there to fetch the cow,” said Sarwar Kamal, a local government administrator.

The 45-year-old was rushed to a local clinic and later moved to hospital in the southern port city of Chittagong.

“His condition is very critical,” said Marjia Khatun, a nurse.

Bangladesh border officials accuse Myanmar security forces of planting mines along border areas.

Border Guard Bangladesh

commander Anwarul Azim said the area where Saturday's incident happened was unfenced and grazing cows very often strayed across.

“The Myanmar army planted those mines a while ago. Rahman accidentally stepped on one of those and lost both his legs,” he said.

Myanmar troops have been accused of waging an ethnic cleansing campaign against the country's Rohingya Muslim minority, nearly 700,000 of whom have fled to Bangladesh since last August.

Rights activists say the mines are aimed at preventing the refugees from returning to their villages.

“By planting these mines, the Myanmar army is trying to ensure that the Rohingya refugees would never try to return home,” said Bangladeshi rights activist Nur Khan Liton.

“They don't care whether they are breaching international law,” Liton said, adding that such acts were “crimes against humanity”.

Since the violence erupted on August 25, several Rohingya have been killed in landmine explosions in no man's land.

By Mizan Rahman
Dhaka

Referring to the recent agitation by various sections of teachers over various demands, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said it will not be possible to realise any demand by putting pressure on the government.

“If anyone thinks it's the last year of the government, and we (government) will fulfil all the demands they're placing that's wrong. I don't care about power. It matters little to me whether I'll be there in power or not,” she said.

The prime minister was addressing an ‘Education Rally’ arranged by the National University at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka. Some 2,040 principals of the colleges under National University from across the country joined the rally.

PM Hasina said the government gives the highest importance to education and has taken many steps for the sector since it assumed office in 1996.

“Anyone didn't need to go for



National University vice chancellor Dr Harun-or Rashid handing over a crest to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday in Dhaka.

any agitation and place demands in this regard since then. You (teachers) can keep trust in the Awami League as it didn't deprive anyone of his or her rights and won't do either as long as it's in power. I'll just say nobody can realise anything exerting pressure on us,” she said, adding, “When we're taking the country forward based on a policy, everything can't be realised by creat-

ing unnecessary pressure.”

Talking about quality education, Hasina said now many persons say that the quality of education is not being maintained. “But there is question here how the standard is measured. Improving the standard is a matter of continuation.”

She stressed the need for having time-befitting curricula in line with the changing world

and urged the teachers to formulate that with a focus on technological education.

Describing teachers as the architects of the nation, she said they will have to think what kind of human beings they are creating through providing lessons as the future of the country and the nation.

The prime minister said the mindset of the teachers and those

prepare curricula will have to be modern as well to take the country forward keeping consistency with the fast changing world.

About the National University (NU), Hasina said there is no session jam at the NU and it also published academic calendar for up to 2021. “Now most NU activities are being conducted with the use of information technology.”

The threat posed by Bitcoin

By Harold James
London

The extraordinary volatility of Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies has become a threat not just to the international financial system, but also to political order. The blockchain technology upon which cryptocurrencies are based promises a better and more secure payment method than anything seen before, and some believe that cryptocurrencies will replace electronic currency in traditional bank accounts, just as electronic transfers replaced paper money, which succeeded gold and silver.

But others are rightly suspicious that this new technology might be manipulated or abused. Money is part of the social fabric. For most of the history of human civilisation, it has provided a basis for trust between people and governments, and between individuals through exchange. It has almost always been an expression of sovereignty as well, and private currencies have been very rare.

In the case of metallic money, coins typically bore emblems of state identity, one of the earliest examples being the owl symbolising Athens. Usually, however, there was some confusion about whether the emblems on coins represented sovereignty or divinity. Whose head is on this coin? Is it Philip of Macedon or Alexander the Great, or is it Hercules? Later, Roman emperors would exploit this ambiguity, by stamping coins with their own “divine” visage. And even today, British coins have embossed words linking the monarchy to God.

Whatever the case, there is a clear pattern throughout history: bad states produce bad money, and bad money leads to failed states. During

periods of inflation or hyperinflation, radical currency devaluation would destroy the basis of political order. For example, the Thirty Years’ War in Central Europe during the seventeenth century was fuelled in large part by social disintegration following a period of monetary instability.

Similarly, during the French Revolution, speculation in a paper currency pegged to “national” property that had been confiscated from aristocrats and the church undermined the Jacobins’ legitimacy. In the twentieth century, periods of inflation during and after the two world wars destroyed Europe’s political institutions and fanned the flames of radicalism. In fact, Vladimir Lenin regarded the currency press as the “simplest way to exterminate the very spirit of capitalism” and bourgeois democracy.

In addition to being one of the main factors behind the disintegration of states, bad money has also been a key feature of interstate conflicts. For belligerent states, creating or exploiting monetary turmoil has historically been a cheap way to destroy opponents. Even in peacetime, some states have responded to deteriorating relations by planting fake money to sow discord beyond their borders.

The best-known example of such monetary warfare is Nazi Germany’s scheme to print the banknotes of Allied powers during World War II. Counterfeit notes could of course be used to purchase scarce resources or pay spies. But Germany also envisioned using long-range bombers to drop forged banknotes over Britain. Just imagine the demoralisation and chaos that would have followed. Anyone with a large amount of money would automatically be suspect, and public trust would quickly erode. Dropping money could very well



be more devastating than dropping bombs.

Money is even easier to manipulate when it is internationalised. In the modern era, rogue states such as North Korea have regularly forged banknotes, particularly those of the United States. And cross-border electronic transfers between banks are often used for malign and criminal purposes. So far, though, there have not been any globally devastating monetary attacks outside the realm of cinematic fantasy.

Of course, there have long been political efforts to undermine or

replace the dollar as the dominant global currency. The most seductive alternative seems to have been gold. Russian theorists of “Eurasia” often tout traditional Russian iconography’s use of the fine metal. In 2001, then-Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad tried to introduce a “gold dinar” as an answer to the US-based currency system. And in 2005, Al Qaeda’s security chief, Saif al-Adl, suggested using gold to topple the dollar.

Bitcoin looks like a 21st-century version of gold, and its creators have

whereby goods and services are worth the amount of human labour put into them – blockchain technology assigns value to a combination of computing power and stored energy, none of it human.

At the same time, cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin have made it all but impossible to distinguish between state and private-sector criminality. North Korea has been suspected of continuing its attempts at monetary manipulation by mining and creating Bitcoin, which has led China and South Korea to start closing down Bitcoin exchanges. Major cryptocurrency platforms such as Coincheck in Japan have also put a halt to trading.

And yet we have already reached the point where a Bitcoin crash could have serious global implications. Financial institutions’ current exposure to the cryptocurrency is unclear, and probably would not be fully revealed until after a financial disaster. It is eerily reminiscent of 2007 and 2008, when no one really knew where the exposure to subprime-mortgage debt ultimately lay. Until the crash, it was anyone’s guess which institutions might be insolvent.

Just as one cannot instantly tell whether a news report is “fake news,” nor can one immediately discern the validity of new monetary forms. Unless a currency has been authenticated by a government, it is unlikely to be fully trusted. But that does not mean that it cannot become a plaything for the naïve and gullible, or a weapon of financial mass destruction for political belligerents around the world. – Project Syndicate

●Harold James is Professor of History and International Affairs at Princeton University and a senior fellow at the Center for International Governance Innovation.

What happened? One day you wake up old

By Gina Barreca
The Hartford Courant

People age all at once. Nobody gets old gradually. One day you look at yourself and – whoa.

Let’s say you’ve looked more or less the same since 2002, or 2012 or 1996: Just pick the year when you last chose to sing along to a brand-new pop song on the radio, and let’s consider that year the time you put your age on “pause.”

But suddenly, overnight – through a combination of the kind of nefarious magic found in cheap time-travelling fantasy novels blended with the rudimentary technology found in episodes of *Star Trek* (which you are old enough to remember) – you are transported into Elder World. You’ve fast-forwarded with a vengeance.

You wake up wondering why you’re surrounded by old people only to realise that you are one of the old people. You might call yourself a boomer, a rocker, a legend or a classic, but at a certain point you realise most respectful people are calling you “Ma’am,” “Sir” or, most unnervingly, “Hon.”

Now that Ringo Starr is most properly and without irony addressed as “Sir Ringo” and Meat Loaf has been referred to as “Mr Loaf” by *The Wall Street Journal* as far back as 2004, we need to reassess how we think of ourselves and consider the best forms of address.

During a Q&A after a recent event, I was asked by a member of the audience how I react when called a syrupy “Dear” or “Hon” by a server or sales associate who might be slightly condescending because I’m the same age as the bad grandma who never remembered their birthday.

I told the audience that I always say, “Hiya, Toots,” and promise to let them know when I’d like their assistance.

Look, I worked retail when I was in my 20s and remember all too well how weird it was to think that anybody over 35 could want, well, anything.

When I worked at Bloomingdale’s, there was a dainty and beautiful woman, easily in her 70s, who regularly used to buy carefully fitted suits from the designer section. I got nervous every time I saw her because I was scared she’d have a heart attack in the dressing room.

Thinking back, however, what I remember most vividly is how fabulous she looked. I now wonder what her story was and wonder about whom she was meeting in those flattering, charming and elegant clothes.

Maybe you’ve got a different response to sudden ageing. Maybe when you wake up and see that you’re older, you don’t think, “Whoa,” but instead, brush it off and think, “So what if my hair is a little wild? I’m only going to the mailbox.”

The only trouble is that this can lead to thinking, “Nobody will notice if there’s a stain on my shirt. Or that it’s misbuttoned. Or inside out. After all, there are only a few people in the studio and, sure, I’ll be on air discussing international politics, but it’ll only be for a couple of minutes.”

Or maybe one day you catch yourself thinking, “You know what would make a great Valentine’s present this year? Matching compression socks.” And then, especially if you can find a coupon, you actually buy them.

As we grow older, we need to adjust to the changes in the world and in ourselves. We need to update our

playlists, our vocabularies, our ideas and our expectations.

Ageing well is like riding a Harley: It’s important to keep up a steady speed and lean into the turns. We have to adjust our centre of gravity.

Nature helps most of us with that last part whether or not we make the request. The rest of the tuneups we need to implement on our own.

Yet my Facebook friend Linda Thompson argues, “Old is a transient state: It comes and it goes. All one needs is a new love, any love, to become young again.”

OK, so you probably shouldn’t buy the new love compression socks until the relationship has travelled a few miles into the journey.

But almost anything can be made intriguing by those of us who understand what it’s like to go to sleep as Annette Funicello and wake up as Bea Arthur.

Say “arch support” like you mean it, Toots, and – whoa.

●Gina Barreca is an English professor at the University of Connecticut and the author of If You Lean In, Will Men Just Look Down Your Blouse? and eight other books. She can be reached at www.ginabarreca.com.

Live issues

Sun safety not a top priority in daycare

By Lisa Rapaport
Reuters Health

Kids in daycare may not always learn about sun safety because their teachers are more focused on lessons about healthy food choices, brushing teeth and getting plenty of exercise, a US study suggests.

Researchers surveyed 202 administrators, managers and teachers at Head Start and other daycare centres in Illinois in July, a time of year when kids are apt to be exposed to harmful ultraviolet (UV) rays.

Overall, when participants ranked their top priorities for teaching toddlers and preschoolers healthy habits, good nutrition came first, followed by exercise, and brushing teeth. Less than one in five respondents listed bike helmets, vaccinations or sun protection as top priorities.

“The seasonal shift in sun intensity in Illinois means that sun safety receives less attention than health promotion activities that apply all year such as good nutrition, adequate exercise and brushing teeth,” said

senior study author Dr June Robinson of the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago.

While about half of the daycare programmes did provide sunscreen for students, 77% of these programmes didn’t allow kids to apply the sunscreen themselves, researchers report in JAMA Dermatology.

It’s possible some daycare centres were following state regulations that apply to students starting in elementary school, which classify sunscreen as an over-the-counter medication that can only be applied by a school nurse with a doctor’s prescription, Robinson said by e-mail. Daycare centres aren’t bound by these regulations, but it might still influence their decisions, Robinson said.

About half of the programmes, however, used spray sunscreens to avoid unnecessarily touching children. This may be one way to help more children get protection, Robinson said by e-mail.

“In the past, touching children, which is prohibited out of concerns about child abuse, prevented the application of the lotion type of

sunscreen,” Robinson said.

Head Start programmes were more likely to use spray sunscreen than other daycare centres, the study found. Often, programmes that did use sprays failed to avoid spraying sunscreen directly on kids’ faces, which can cause children to inhale it or get it in their eyes and isn’t the correct way to apply this product.

Most programmes did not report children having any sunburns, and most also followed guidelines for keeping kids out of the sun during when the heat index is too high.

One limitation of the study is that it only examined daycare centres in Illinois, and it’s possible the results would be different in places with other regulations regarding sunblock application in schools or different seasonal weather, the authors note.

Still, the results highlight a need to raise awareness about the need for sun protection for kids in early childhood programmes, said Dr Henry Lim, president of the American Academy of Dermatology and senior vice-president for academic affairs at the Henry Ford Health System in Detroit, Michigan.

“It is totally appropriate and


understandable that top concerns were good nutrition, adequate exercise, brushing teeth and wearing seat belts, but teachers need to be educated about the long term side effects of sun exposure,” Lim, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by e-mail. “Aside from sunburn, teachers obviously would not observe the skin ageing and skin cancers in their students; therefore, education is needed.”

Parents can also help make sun safety a priority, said Mary Tripp of the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Centre in Houston.

“Parents can apply sunscreen lotion to children before they go to school and provide sunscreen for teachers to use at school,” Tripp, who wasn’t involved in the study, said by e-mail.

“Parents also can provide wide-brimmed hats and other protective clothing such as shirts with longer sleeves for their children to use at school,” Tripp added. “By practising sun protection themselves, parents can role model these behaviours for their children, which is critical in helping children develop these healthy habits at a young age.”

WEATHER REPORT



Three-day forecast

TODAY
Maximum Temperature : 23°C
Minimum Temperature : 14°C

TUESDAY
Maximum Temperature : 24°C
Minimum Temperature : 14°C

WEDNESDAY
Maximum Temperature : 26°C
Minimum Temperature : 16°C

Fisherman's forecast

WARNING
Inshore : Poor visibility expected at places at first.

Offshore : Nil

WEATHER
Inshore : Hazy to misty/foggy at places at first, becomes moderate temperature daytime and cold by night.


Offshore : Northwesterly-North-easterly 05-15

Visibility : 4 - 8/2 KM or less at places at first.

SEA STATE
Offshore : 2-4 FT

Around the region

	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow	Max/min
Baghdad	P Cloudy	22/11	M Cloudy	24/09
Kuwait City	M Sunny	22/10	P Cloudy	23/11
Manama	Sunny	22/13	Sunny	23/14
Muscat	Sunny	24/17	Sunny	24/17
Tehran	P Cloudy	09/03	Sunny	13/04



Around the world

	Weather today	Max/min	Weather tomorrow	Max/min
Athens	M Sunny	18/07	Sunny	16/07
Beirut	P Cloudy	22/17	M Sunny	22/15
Bangkok	P Cloudy	30/19	Sunny	28/19
Berlin	M Sunny	01/-5	P Cloudy	01/-7
Cairo	P Cloudy	29/16	P Cloudy	28/16
Cape Town	Sunny	30/17	P Cloudy	22/17
Colombo	S T Storms	31/24	S T Storms	31/24
Dhaka	M Sunny	29/17	P Cloudy	29/16
Hong Kong	Sunny	15/11	Sunny	17/12
Istanbul	P Cloudy	11/06	P Cloudy	11/05
Jakarta	T Storm	29/24	T Storm	29/24
Karachi	M Cloudy	28/12	Sunny	29/11
London	P Cloudy	05/0	P Cloudy	04/1
Manila	P Cloudy	30/22	P Cloudy	29/22
Moscow	S Showers	-11/16	Cloudy	-11/16
New Delhi	M Cloudy	23/12	M Cloudy	23/08
New York	Sunny	02/-3	P Cloudy	06/0
Paris	Cloudy	04/01	Rain & Snow	03/-2
Sao Paulo	Cloudy	24/18	Cloudy	26/18
Seoul	Sunny	-6/15	Sunny	-6/-14
Singapore	P Cloudy	30/24	P Cloudy	30/24
Sydney	Sunny	25/18	P Cloudy	24/19
Tokyo	Clear	08/01	Clear	06/0



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Smokers should quit instead of cutting down

It has been proven one more time that smoking is bad for health, even if it is just one cigarette a day. A new report cites researchers saying that smoking just one single cigarette a day can significantly raise the risk of heart disease and stroke.

While it is better to cut down than to smoke heavily, the study contradicts the common belief that cutting way down also reduces risk quite a bit. In fact, cutting back from a pack a day to just one cigarette a day only lowers the heart health risks a little bit, Allan Hackshaw at the UCL Cancer Institute at University College London and colleagues found.

“We have shown that a large proportion of the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke comes from smoking only a few cigarettes,” Hackshaw’s team wrote in the British Medical Journal’s online publication The BMJ. This has important consequences for smokers who believe that light smoking carries little or no harm.

Hackshaw’s team went back through all the credible health studies they could find dating back to 1946. They looked at how many cigarettes people reported smoking and looked at what happened to those smokers. For men, smoking one cigarette a day on average raised the risk of heart disease by 48% over a non-smoker, while smoking 20 cigarettes a day doubled the risk. For a woman the risks were even higher. Smoking one cigarette a day raised heart disease risk for women by 57% and 20 cigarettes a day raised the risk 2.8 times. Men who smoked one cigarette per day did not have 1/20th the risk – one half of 1% – compared to a pack-a-day smoker, but instead had 46% of the extra risk of heart disease. The conclusion from Hackshaw’s team is that no safe level of smoking exists for cardiovascular disease.

“The take-home message for smokers is that any exposure to cigarette smoke is too much,” Kenneth Johnson, an epidemiologist at the University of Ottawa who was not involved in the research, wrote in an editorial. “New tobacco products, such as e-cigarettes and heat-not-burn cigarettes, may carry substantial risk for heart disease and stroke,” Johnson added. It is still worth trying to cut back, said Paul Aveyard of the University of Oxford, who also was not involved in the study.

“This well-conducted study confirms what many epidemiologists have suspected but few among the public have: light smoking creates a substantial risk for heart disease and stroke. The implication is obvious – anyone who smokes should stop,” Aveyard said.

A new report released last week from the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine found little evidence about the health risks of e-cigarettes but said they might be useful if used to help smokers cut down or quit. Smokers should quit instead of cutting down, using appropriate cessation aids if needed, to significantly reduce their risk of heart disease and stroke. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in the US and most developed countries, and it is estimated that smoking is a key trigger for heart disease deaths.

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South Korean leader’s Olympic realpolitik

By Christopher R Hill
Seoul

South Korean President Moon Jae-in has made a good start to the New Year. Not only did he broker an agreement to bring North Korea to the Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang; he also convinced US President Donald Trump that doing so was in fact Trump’s idea.

With his Olympic coup, Moon has both managed the North Korean threat to the Games and avoided any backlash from the United States. Still, the agreement that North and South Korea reached in the border village of Panmunjom earlier this month is unlikely to lead to renewed nuclear-disarmament talks.

Rather, once the Games are over, the North will likely use the current diplomatic opening to probe in other areas unrelated to its nuclear programme, which, in turn, will raise a set of trying and familiar issues for the US-South Korea relationship.

After all, North Korean leader Kim Jong-un certainly wasn’t motivated by a genuine New Year’s resolution when he called for better relations with South Korea on January 1. On the contrary, his gambit was in keeping with the North’s longstanding policy of trying to weaken the US-South Korean alliance.

In reaching out to the South, Kim wants to demonstrate that the North can live peacefully with its neighbours, even as it maintains a nuclear arsenal. More broadly, Kim is seeking to normalise the North’s status as a wannabe, self-identified nuclear power in the eyes of the world.



A North Korean national flag (top) and a South Korean national flag (bottom) flutter over the Athletes Village in Pyeongchang on February 1, 2018.

Achieving these goals, Kim hopes, will drive a wedge between the US and South Korea. He knows that Trump’s approval ratings in South Korea are far lower than his already-abysmal ratings in the US, so he is exploiting that fact to facilitate his nuclear-normalisation objective. And, of course, the North is always looking for opportunities to win relief from sanctions.

Moon, for his part, has handled Kim’s “peace offensive” well. North Korea’s Olympians and cheerleaders will undoubtedly be greeted enthusiastically when they arrive by train in the South, and the crowd will roar its approval when athletes from the two countries march into the stadium under the same banner.

To be sure, the North Koreans will think they were invited to participate in the Games not in spite of their nuclear programme, but because of it. From their perspective, South Korea seems to have developed a newfound respect – or fear – of what the North is becoming. And participation in the Olympics suggests that international isolation is a temporary fact of life, a toll on the road to fully recognised nuclear status. They might think that, soon enough, other countries will be lining up to offer the North a seat at the diplomatic table.

But Moon has made it clear that his government will not be seduced by the Olympic spirit. If North Korea’s leaders expect participation in the Games to lead to recognition of their country’s nuclear status, they will be waiting a long time. The South’s goal is to host a successful Olympic Games, after a year in which many countries questioned whether it was safe to send a delegation at all. Once the Games are over, the North will be facing a long winter of opprobrium and isolation.

That means the North would be wrong to assume that the South will beg it to reopen the Kaesong Industrial Complex, one of the most ambitious North-South co-operative efforts of the 2003-2009 detente era. Moon has shown no interest in such gestures. He

understands that unilateral concessions will not improve South Korea’s position vis-a-vis the other regional and global powers reacting to North Korean behaviour.

Like the Saudis and others before him, Moon knows that the way to Trump’s heart is through his ego. But he also must manage the broader front of countries that are participating in historically strong sanctions against an abhorrent state. In that respect, Moon’s first big test will come immediately after the Olympics, when the South Korea-US Combined Forces Command will decide on its plans for future military exercises.

North Korea, of course, will object to such exercises, as it always does. But so, too, might China and Russia, which will accuse the US of reversing the Olympic thaw. Even so, a military alliance without exercises is like an orchestra without instruments. Moon most likely understands this, just as he realises that the importance of his country’s relationship with the US, despite its headaches and complexities, dwarfs that of any of its other partnerships around the world.

At the end of the day, a progressive South Korean government such as Moon’s always must demonstrate to the public that it can manage and safeguard the US relationship. So far, Moon has done that. – Project Syndicate

● Christopher R Hill, former US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, is Chief Advisor to the Chancellor for Global Engagement and Professor of the Practice in Diplomacy at the University of Denver, and the author of Outpost.



North and South Korean skiers pose for a photo during a joint training session at the Masikryong, or Masik pass’ ski resort, near North Korea’s east coast port city of Wonsan on February 1.

Sri Lankan Fest begins at LuLu Hypermarket

The Sri Lankan Festival was launched yesterday, for the first time, at all LuLu outlets in Qatar under the theme ‘Rasavat Sri Lanka’.

The festival “mainly exhibits Sri Lankan ethnic/grocery items and agricultural/organic produce”, LuLu Group has said in a press statement, noting that it highlights the “diverse culture, deep-rooted values and culinary heritage of Sri Lanka.”

The festival was inaugurated by Sri Lankan ambassador ASP Liyanage at LuLu Hypermarket, Barwa City. The inaugural ceremony was also attended by Mohamed Althaf, director of LuLu Group International, and several distinguished guests from banks, schools and the retail and FMCG sectors, including a large gathering of shoppers and officials from LuLu outlets.

The festival also features some traditional art forms from Sri Lanka, including calypso, and other cultural programmes such as Kandyan dancing, etc, to create the appropriate ambience. Among the highlights is a ‘fusion show’ performed by students of Lasanthi Dancing Academy based on the popular Kandyan dance.

A wide range of Sri Lankan commodities and agricultural produce is available at discounted



Sri Lankan ambassador ASP Liyanage, LuLu Group International director Mohamed Althaf and other dignitaries and officials at the festival's inauguration at LuLu Hypermarket, Barwa City yesterday. **PICTURE:** Noushad Thekkayil

prices, and special counters have been set to facilitate tasting and sampling for customers. The festival continues until February 10.

LuLu Group has organised the festival in co-operation with its export unit – YAS Lanka – in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The unit was set up last year with a view

to boost sourcing operations and bring in high-quality products for LuLu’s chain of hypermarkets across the world, the statement noted. The Group said it has been exporting \$5mn worth of fruits, vegetables and commodities from Sri Lanka, and the real measure of progress is that the

quantum of export has gone up considerably since the opening of the new export distribution centre. LuLu Group has similar export distribution centres in 24 countries, including the UK, US, Spain, Turkey, Vietnam, Thailand, China and Africa.

The festival's launch coincides

with Sri Lanka's Independence Day, adding more relevance and value to the festival, the statement adds. Further, the Group said it has plans to venture into the retail sector in the next phase with a “world-class” shopping mall and modern hypermarket in Colombo, and spadework is under way.

Costa Rica envoy visits Hamad Bin Khalifa University

The ambassador of Costa Rica, Luis Alberto Guillén Downing, visited Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU) yesterday to inaugurate an exhibition at the Education City Student Center, showcasing the diverse arts and crafts, pictures, videos, and traditional costumes of Costa Rica.

The exhibition was part of a cultural week that ended yesterday. The event aimed to introduce the colourful culture of the most visited nation in all of Central America to the community.

The opening of the event, co-organised with the embassy of Costa Rica in Qatar, was also attended by the consul and charge d'affaires Carlos Beer Arguello.

HBKU's hosting of the Costa Rican cultural week comes as the latest in a series of events that aim to portray a vibrant picture of other customs and traditions.

Maryam Hamad al-Mannai, vice president of student affairs at HBKU, said: “HBKU is a true melting pot and is proud of its community of faculty, researchers and students, who work together with a common goal in mind – to be creative, to pursue excellence in all of their endeavours, and to celebrate their diversity every day.

Without its multicultural student body, HBKU would not be the centre of academic and innovative excellence that it is today. We believe this is something that truly deserves recognition.”

At the inauguration, ambassador Downing delivered a short presentation on Costa Rica to the body of students, staff, faculty of HBKU and the greater Education City community in attendance. In his address, the ambassador highlighted the distinctive historic, cultural, economic, educational, geographic and touristic strengths of the Central American country that is home to 4.5mn people.



Maryam Hamad al-Mannai presents ambassador Luis Alberto Guillén Downing with a memento.

Joyalukkas offers Be Mine diamond jewellery collection

Joyalukkas has announced that it is offering, this month, a new collection of “love-inspired” diamond, pearl and 18K gold jewellery in time for Valentine’s Day. Until February 17, shoppers can “fall in love with a gorgeous selection of necklaces, earrings, bangles and rings with unique heart designs in the limited-edition Be Mine Collection,” the leading Jeweller has said in a press statement. “The Be Mine Collection is a special line of diamond jewellery,” said Joy Alukkas, Joyalukkas Group chairman and MD. “But this exclusive collection for Valentine’s Day 2018 is truly extraordinary. We are sure shoppers would fall in love with these unique designs and enjoy them as gifts for their loved ones and even themselves.” Along with the launch of the limited-edition Be Mine Collection, shoppers can also enjoy special cashback offers and discounts across Joyalukkas over 140 showrooms in 11 countries, the statement adds.





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Solar energy powers public gardens

As part of the ongoing co-operation between Al Shamal Municipality and Ras Laffan Community Outreach Programme, a project was implemented to install solar energy recharge stations at the public gardens. The project also includes installing umbrellas and lights that works with solar energy at the beaches and public parks of Al Shamal Municipality. In all, 34 beach umbrellas, equipped with two white LED lights of 18 watts, were installed at all the beaches at Al Ruwais, Al Shammal, and Abu Zalluf, besides Al Ghariya beach. Also, 10 solar energy-operated recharge stations were installed, with each including a LED light unit of 32 watts, for recharging mobile phones, in addition to a platform to supply Wi-Fi at the public parks. Hamad Juma al-Mannai, director of Al Shamal Municipality, honoured yesterday Sheikhna Dana Rashid al-Thani, senior officer of Ras Laffan Community Outreach Programme, and a representative of Al Emadi Solar, the company that implemented the project.



Officials inspect one of the solar lights installed in a park.

QRCS holds orientation session for HMC doctors



Dr Khaled Diab addressing the audience.

Qatar Red Crescent Society (QRCS) held an orientation session for the doctors of Hamad Medical Corporation (HMC) to recruit volunteers with its future medical missions abroad.

Hosted by HMC's Medical Training Centre, the session was attended by Dr Abdul-Salam al-Qahtani, head, Department



Members of the audience listening to the presentation.

of Otorhinolaryngology, Head, and Neck Surgery and director of training at HMC and Board Member of QRCS; Dr Abdullah Rashid al-Naimi, senior consultant urologist at Hamad General Hospital and board member of QRCS; Dr Khaled Abdul-Hadi, head of HMC's Audiology and Balance Center and Head of

QRCS's Haj Medical Mission; and Dr Khaled Diab, adviser, Relief and International Development Division, QRCS.

Several new and expert doctors listened to a presentation about QRCS's history and humanitarian mission.

They also learnt about QRCS-HMC's joint achievements over

the past few years, as well as a list of medical projects planned for 2018. According to Dr Diab, QRCS has 17 foreign missions and offices in both Asia and Africa. "The 2018 budget for international relief and development projects is QR537mn. These include His Highness the Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad

al-Thani's Medical Scholarship Programme for Gaza Doctors, the Child Catheterisation Programme, and eye camps, among many others," he explained.

"Our 2018 plan includes four child and one adult catheterisation missions, six eye camps, and 12 miscellaneous medical/surgical camps. The scope of the plan covers 13 countries: Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Jordan, the Philippines, Somalia, Ghana, Niger, Palestine, Lebanon, Turkey, Ethiopia, Sudan, and South Sudan," said Dr Diab.

"We hope that more doctors of HMC will contribute their time and effort for humanitarian causes. It is not a matter of travelling to perform medical examinations and operations and then going back home. Your effort is needed in guidance, supervision, and strategic planning for new health centres and cancer hospitals, as well as training for local medical staff," he added.

Dr al-Qahtani emphasised the co-operation between QRCS and HMC with support from the Ministry of Public Health.

Nama Centre unveils 'Moqbeleen' campaign

The Social Development Centre - Nama - which functions under the Qatar Foundation for Social Work, launched the 'Moqbeleen' awareness campaign recently for the second consecutive year.

'Moqbeleen' is an awareness and cultural campaign that aims to promote Nama's projects, programmes and services. The campaign also aims to raise awareness on the importance of educational attainment, seizing the right opportunities, and channelling the specialised platforms in all schools, universities, youth forums, youth academies and all civil society organisations.

Nama intends to attract and

train active youth through this campaign. Nama's acting executive director Maryam bint Abdullatif al-Mannai said she is immensely proud of the integrated campaign. She cited the comprehensive nature of Nama's projects, as they respond to the aspirations of the Qatari youth through multiple programmes. "We are always keen on promoting the concept of sustainability in education, awareness and social development, investing in human capital and the young and promising generations, creating a conscious generation and hence a society that is keen to define its priorities properly," al-Mannai said.

The campaign kicked off at the 'Simaisma Girls Forum', which was an opportunity to meet with the female youths who welcomed the new projects after learning about Nama's goals, activities, and services. Ambassadors of the campaign also visited Hamad Bin Khalifa Medical City, in co-operation with the Career Services and Recruitment Departments. The visit included scheduled sessions with the targeted group of high school and university students.

Nama's Programmes of Community Outreach head Abdul Rahman al-Sayed stressed that rapid social, economic and developmental progress create new

conditions and circumstances that call for the collective efforts of all components of the society. "Therefore, Nama is keen to highlight the importance of an efficient and effective community awareness plan about social work," he said.

The centre introduces programmes aimed at targeting groups in the different fields of training, entrepreneurship development, and social entrepreneurship. It also develops the capacities of youth and introduces scholarships and university programmes to students. "We hope that these programmes will be adequate to most of our youth aspirations and requirements,

address their needs and queries, and provide all means to overcome the obstacles they are facing," al-Sayed said.

The campaign includes a variety of constructive and targeted projects that seek to contribute to the progress and advancement of Qatar, diversify competencies, and meet the needs of the labour market. One of the most prominent projects is the "Social Entrepreneurship Development" project, where 17 social entrepreneurs of the first-generation graduated on January 18 in the presence of HE Sheikh Thani bin Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani at the Qatar National Convention Centre.



'Moqbeleen' campaign provides Qatari youths with a portfolio of pioneering projects.



A Nama workshop in session for young females.

LG Electronics set to launch AI-enabled products in Qatar

By Joseph Varghese
Staff Reporter

South Korean electronics giant and technology innovator LG Electronics will launch several of its Artificial Intelligence (AI)-enabled products named 'LG Thinku' in Qatar this year.

"We will be launching many of our latest premium products in Qatar and other Middle East and African countries this year," Jae H Ahn, team leader and director, Brand Promotion Team, Global Marketing, LG told *Gulf Times* on the sidelines of LG Innofest 2018 in Cape Town, South Africa.

"We will begin with LG OLED AI TV, which is to be launched in Qatar during the first half of this year. It will be followed by the LG Signature Refrigerator as well as the LG signature TwinWash washing machine," he explained.

"Thinku means 'think of you! It highlights LG's strong commitment to provide the best solutions to the daily life of our customers. It is not about just technology but to provide the best outcomes of AI. The AI technology-enabled products will understand the daily behaviour of the customers and will act accordingly in helping them," Ahn said.

"For example, the washing machine will learn what washing cycle you prefer, and according to the weather condition will suggest the best washing cycle. There are security measures to store the

information of the customers within each gadget. It will help improve the experience of the customers in a big way and make their daily routine smoother," continued Ahn.

"The AI-enabled TV is another gadget that will give a number of advantages for the customer. While watching any programme, you can speak through the remote control and it will identify the voice command. If you want to know the name of an actor or a place, ask through the remote control and all the details will be displayed on the screen.

"The new refrigerator will recognise the products inside and reveal the expiry dates of the products. In addition it will also provide the recipe for cooking the food items inside," said the official.

According to Ahn, the latest air conditioning solutions with the cutting-edge Inverter Technology is also another key highlight from the LG this year. While regular air conditioners can only turn on and off, LG's Inverter Technology can control rotation frequency to produce cooling more efficiently. "LG's smart inverter technology has taken LG Electronics to new heights in energy efficient and durable home appliances that facilitate savings from day one.

"The smart inverter compressor technology has proven to be a ground-breaking solution with exceptional performance attributes specially designed for modern consumer," added Ahn.



LG's Jae H Ahn speaking to *Gulf Times* in Cape Town, South Africa.

Baladna to showcase products in QSSE '18

Qatari farm and food supplier Baladna has announced its participation in the 'Qatar Sufficiency Exhibition (QSSE) 2018', a first-of-its-kind event in the region dedicated to diversifying production lines and shaping the country's future economy.

Baladna will be covering a 100sq m space to showcase the company's dairy and the food products at the exhibition slated from April 1 to 3 at the Doha Exhibition and Convention Centre (DECC). The QSSE is organised by HiSky for Tourism and Exhibitions with the Ministry of Economy and

Commerce as the event's Main Partner. "Baladna is proud to take part in such an initiative because it plays a key role in the economic development and food security programme of the state of Qatar," said Baladna CEO Peter Weltevreten.

He added: "Baladna has shown big expansion up to now, leading to a very promising start of its new business in less than a year from its establishment in late 2016. We are delighted to showcase our achievements during QSSE and to meet potential consumers, customers, and investors to discuss our plans going forward."



Cows on a rotary milking system at the Baladna farm in Qatar.